



General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

8th plenary meeting
Thursday, 26 September 2019, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Muhammad-Bande (Nigeria)

In the absence of the President, Ms. Beckles (Trinidad and Tobago), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Address by Mr. Milo Đukanović, President of Montenegro

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Montenegro.

Mr. Milo Đukanović, President of Montenegro, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Milo Đukanović, President of Montenegro, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Đukanović (*spoke in Montenegrin; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): It is a great honour for me to address the General Assembly on behalf of Montenegro and to reaffirm our strong commitment to the goals, the fundamental tenets and the principles of the United Nations. In the year when we mark 100 years of multilateralism, in an atmosphere of increasingly sharp polarization, fragmentation and instability in international relations, and at a time of economic and geopolitical uncertainty, it is our common responsibility to demonstrate the true value of United Nations action and efficient multilateralism as the only global solutions to global challenges.

That is why I want to particularly commend the commitment of the Secretary-General Guterres to the reform and strengthening of the multilateral system. As he said, strengthening multilateralism today means strengthening our commitment to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to the development of a more secure and just world for future generations.

I want to assure Member States that Montenegro remains firmly committed to the approach defined by the founders of the world Organization that we accepted in 2006 after we restored our independence and became a full-fledged member of the United Nations. It is the approach of being a good neighbour, strongly and resolutely defending universal values and principles, and being a reliable partner in efforts to maintain international peace and security. I believe that every country, regardless of the figures that it records, can by its own example contribute to global solutions and be a part of them.

The choice of priorities of the President of the General Assembly and the theme of this year's debate indicate the key challenges with which we have continuously been faced and to which we, as a community, have unfortunately not yet been able to find an effective and comprehensive response.

The data show that the number of displaced persons in the world has reached the record figure of 70 million, which is the largest number since the Second World War. There are approximately 26 million refugees, half of whom are less than 18 years of age.

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Last year, a tragically high number of children were killed or wounded, most of them in Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen. A record number of very young children have died in Syria since the beginning of the war in that country, which is in its ninth year. The figures for those suffering from the Ebola virus in the Democratic Republic of Congo show that children are also among the most affected. We could unfortunately provide a long list of devastating numbers from Libya, Somalia and the Sahel region, of persecuted Rohingya people and so on.

We can only wonder what the future of those children and of those societies may be. Can we already say that they are the lost generations or can we still do something urgently and prevent millions of children and young people around the world, deprived of their fundamental rights and the opportunities to learn and receive an education, from falling victim to various traffickers and sexual and gender-based violence, being abused for political purposes or suffering the worst forms of violence and violent extremism. The exceptional Kofi Annan talked passionately about the immense transformative power of education. He always emphasized that education is the foundation of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development. We believe that, by ensuring access to education, we are creating conditions for the development of future leaders and drivers of social change for better and more secure societies.

Solidarity with displaced persons and refugees must not be a matter of political decision or choice. That is, above all, a matter of humanity. Montenegro states this based on its own experiences. Montenegro accepted a huge number of displaced persons during the wars in the former Yugoslavia. At one point, refugees made up a fifth of our total population. More than two decades after the end of the conflict, Montenegro is still working with the countries of the region and with the support of the international community to seek permanent solutions for those most affected by the war. A significant number of such persons remain in Montenegro. They give an added value to our multi-ethnic harmony after having integrated into Montenegrin society.

I fully agree that the burden on host countries is too heavy. But our humanity must urge us to show solidarity and a willingness to share the burden in every situation. During the 1990s, we in Montenegro had no dilemma in accepting those who left their homes under the threat of

war. Today the threats are multifold. People are running away not only from wars and persecution but also from the consequences of global warming and natural disasters. I believe that our societies, particularly our communities in the Mediterranean and Europe, will not allow our sea to become a tomb and the place of our civilization's collapse.

There is no country in the world that can deal with the issues of migration and forced displacement alone. Any form of long-term instability would make all of us vulnerable. We need the full implementation of the agreed global treaties on migration and refugees.

This week's Climate Action Summit 2019 has shown that the existing high level of international activities is not enough to achieve the goals agreed upon within the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. I take this opportunity to commend and support the initiative of the Secretary-General to accelerate international action, given how urgently we need to strengthen our global response with resolute and ambitious actions in order to implement the international commitments undertaken.

Initial results in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development demonstrate a necessity to ensure that its transformative potential is focused on improving governance mechanisms and reforming existing development models. At all levels, our reaction has to be based on continuous engagement aimed at introducing sustainable development practices within the frameworks of complex political processes, such as the continuous generation of new ideas and actions aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Implementing the SDGs has to be based on the integrative nature of sustainable development policy. At the same time, an objective analysis of the achievements is equally important, both in national and global contexts.

Within the constraints of its own capacities, Montenegro will continue providing maximum support for the transformation of development based on accelerating the implementation of the SDGs and their targets with a view to achieving continuous, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, protecting natural resources, improving human resources and strengthening of social inclusion. We believe that in this way we are strengthening the institutional system of our independent State and stable economy, striving to make choices that will ensure long-term security. This has resulted in our NATO membership and the

ongoing process of integrating into the European Union (EU). Although we have recorded significant progress in achieving the global goals, we need further efforts to reduce the risk of poverty in a more dramatic way and to eliminate disparities in regional development. We are aware that the basis for the improvement of human rights lies in reducing inequalities. As a new member of the Economic and Social Council, Montenegro will commit to working on accelerating the comprehensive implementation of the key multilateral development treaties.

An increasing number of conflicts and growing threats to international peace and security demand changes in present global practices and require a holistic and coordinated prevention-based approach within the United Nations system. Prevention of conflicts and a focus on concerted efforts are particularly important for a sustainable peace agenda. In that regard, we should not neglect the importance of synergy between the Security Council and the General Assembly and the important prevention capacity of the Human Rights Council. As an active participant in the work of the Human Rights Council, we are fully aware of its achievements and its contribution to the system for early warning and prevention of violence and mass atrocities. Unfortunately, we can see that these mechanisms are not used in the proper way and that we keep repeating, or risk repeating, dangerous mistakes from the not-so-distant past.

Intensification of tensions and renewal of rhetoric from the Cold War-era, cruel civic and regional conflicts, an increase in the activities of armed non-State actors, an increase in spending on arms, as well as the use of hybrid warfare instruments, all call for exceptional caution, an urgent return to dialogue and restoration of trust among key international relations stakeholders.

The abandonment of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty has put us before a situation where we have to face a security issue that requires the establishment of a strategic dialogue. The world without the INF calls for taking responsibility, not avoiding it. The uncertainty regarding the preservation and full implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear programme raises additional serious concerns. Any spillover of conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, would contribute to the development of humanitarian and security crises that would have an impact on the wider

region and global relations, becoming the source of additional insecurity and unpredictable consequences.

Montenegro is firmly committed and determined to make an active and constructive contribution and support collective efforts to preserve international peace and security. We will continue to provide strong support for global efforts to control arms, disarmament and non-proliferation, and especially for the Secretary General's disarmament agenda. At the same time, Montenegro will continue its active participation in United Nations, EU and NATO-led peacekeeping operations, remaining aware that only a safe neighbourhood can guarantee our security and prosperity.

At a time when the universal nature of human rights is being questioned and we are faced with exhausting discussions about the relationship between human rights, development and the responsibility of the State to protect the rights of its citizens, Montenegro remains permanently committed to democratic values and the rule of law and to the fight against impunity for violations and abuses of human rights.

We strongly believe that equality and non-discrimination are values that we can never take for granted. They require permanent attention, struggle and willingness to respond to the challenges brought forth by those who attack or jeopardize them in any way. We are alarmed by the increase of intolerance, xenophobia, racial and religious intolerance, hate speech and anti-Semitism.

Improving and supporting the integration of human rights and gender perspective in all aspects of the United Nations work and preserving the universal nature and independence of the human rights system remain our absolute priorities. We will continue to provide particularly strong support for the efforts towards preventing sexual violence and abuse, as one of the cruellest forms of violation of rights and denial of freedom and dignity, as well as to the implementation of both the women and peace and security agenda, and the youth, peace and security agenda.

Our vision of the future and humankind relies on a strong and efficient Organization that is up to the challenges of the new era and is capable of adapting to new realities. As a country that started using the Delivering as One integrated cooperation model in 2009 and is directly experiencing its benefits, we support the

processes initiated by the Secretary-General to reform the Secretariat and the entire system,

Only through the full implementation of the required steps for reform, an integrated and coherent approach and sustainable financing can the work of our global Organization be more efficient and effective. Preconditions for a successful United Nations lie in flexibility, understanding and respecting the needs of all countries. We should work further on them.

Montenegro today is a multi-ethnic democracy with dynamic economic development, a member of NATO and far advanced in the negotiations for European Union membership. Montenegro is, above all, a good and responsible neighbour whose role is recognized as an important factor for regional stability in the Western Balkans, and whose secure future is possible only through its full integration into the European Union. A United Europe is a precondition for the security and global competitiveness of Europe.

Our national and foreign policy priorities consist of the development and strengthening of a legally efficient, institutionally strong and economically sustainable State that is based on democratic principles, the respect for human rights and freedoms and preservation of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. We aim to implement those priorities with clear vision, determination and consistency. That is what we are recognized for. We believe that we can be reliable on the global level and act as a strong member of the international community only if we are responsible to ourselves and act as a credible partner in the region. In that regard, Montenegro will continue to provide an active contribution to the achievement of the goals of the United Nations.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Montenegro for the statement he has just made.

His Excellency Mr. Milo Đukanović, President of Montenegro, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Evaristo do Espirito Santo Carvalho, President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe.

Mr. Evaristo do Espirito Santo Carvalho, President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Evaristo do Espirito Santo Carvalho, President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Carvalho: *(spoke in Portuguese; English interpretation provided by the delegation):* On behalf of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Professor Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. We offer him our full support during the duration of his mandate, which, we hope, will enable our Organization to make progress in addressing the most pressing issues that affect our peoples and the planet as a whole. We also congratulate the outgoing President, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for the wisdom with which she carried out the work of the previous session.

Furthermore, we take this opportunity to pay tribute to Secretary-General António Guterres for his tireless efforts to strengthen the role of our Organization in promoting peace, democracy and the protection of human life worldwide, as well as in combating poverty in all its forms in order to achieve sustainable development.

We welcome the theme of this session, “Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion”, because we believe in multilateralism as a means to solve the enormous and difficult problems facing the globe. Given that poverty is the greatest scourge of humankind, it is no coincidence that its eradication appears as the first Sustainable Development Goal. Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, should be the number-one priority for all of the countries of the world that make up the United Nations.

Poverty is a major cause of hunger, land degradation, the unbridled exploitation of natural resources, armed conflict, the displacement of peoples, the saturation of major urban centres and migratory flows from south to north. And, as we all know, it has tragic consequences. It is in all of our interests to have societies in which peace,

stability, progress and social justice reign, which means that we must unite our efforts to find the best solutions for our countries and regions, while also safeguarding their specificities. Only then will migratory flows be stopped. When it comes to the migratory flow from the south to the north, there is an unjustifiable impasse at hand. The destination countries must combine their efforts and coordinate their refugee reception policies and provide adequate support to the countries of origin in order to combat this sad phenomenon.

We believe that it is in the interest of us all to have peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies, which translates into the need to unite our efforts to find solutions not only to the refugee problem, but also to the various armed conflicts that unfortunately continue to cloud various regions of the world. In that connection, it is advisable for our Organization to create more binding mechanisms to ensure solidarity with the victims of war and terrorism and to create lasting solutions to both old and new conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian conflict, the Libyan conflict, the deployments of terrorist groups in the Sahel, and the actions of the Al-Shabaab terrorist groups in East Africa and Boko Haram in Central and West Africa. The situation of persistent political and military instability in the Central African Republic represents a great challenge for us and requires that we undertake concerted efforts to silence the guns in order to enable a negotiated solution through permanent dialogue with a view to ending the suffering of the Central African people.

The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe welcomes the positive evolution of the ongoing democratic consolidation process in the Republic of Guinea-Bissau and encourages the Bissau-Guinean political actors to continue that path in order to ensure success in the presidential elections scheduled for November. In the same vein, we hope that the general elections in Mozambique scheduled for next October will take place in normal conditions and in peace and harmony, to the benefit of the country's socioeconomic development and the well-being of the Mozambican people.

With regard to the situation in the Sahara, we call on the parties to commit to the political process within the framework of the United Nations until its completion. In addition, we commend Morocco's efforts aimed at reaching a political settlement of the Sahara regional dispute, based on the Moroccan autonomy initiative.

Sao Tome and Principe once again reiterates its support for the Cuban people and calls on the international community to work towards the normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States of America and the lifting of the trade embargo, thereby allowing for Cuba's progress and development.

In addition to the consequences of violent extremism, the world faces many other challenges, such as the devastating effects of climate change, which pose serious obstacles to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals to which we all committed in this very Hall in 2015. We therefore believe that the United Nations must assume its true leadership role by uniting efforts to combat climate change. Natural disasters are occurring on a larger and more intense scale, leading to lives being lost, especially in the least developed regions of our planet. Global efforts must undoubtedly continue under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and that responsibility must be shared among us all, because we are the ones responsible for safeguarding the future for the generations to come.

We strongly believe in our Organization as the ideal vehicle to harmonize our world through respecting differences, cultures, models and systems of Government, but also to provide solutions capable of underpinning cooperation and exchanges that generate wealth, prosperity and lasting peace for all. Sustainable development has gained prominence in the debates of recent General Assembly sessions, demonstrating clearly the spirit of inclusion for which we strive. But in order for this spirit of inclusion to become a reality for all, we must see to it that the reform our Organization also becomes a reality, so that Africa may take up its rightful place and cease to be the only continent without a permanent seat on the Security Council.

As a small island developing State, and with all the constraints that come with that status, the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe pursues policies adapted to our reality, with full respect for multicultural diversity and human rights. With no mineral resources and an economy highly vulnerable to external shocks, our country has faced enormous challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals but has been making efforts to attain the goals that have been set. In order for these efforts to be effective, it is essential that we be able to count on the international community to provide the development-financing mechanisms announced at certain international forums. We cannot

make lasting democratic achievements without sustained economic growth.

In that regard, and as the Assembly is aware, Sao Tome and Principe is preparing to graduate from the category of least developed countries to that of middle-income countries by December 2024, reflecting the efforts undertaken and the progress made by our country in key areas of sustainable development. However, our country will continue to face enormous challenges even after having graduated into that new category, and the continued support of the international community will be indispensable. Speaking from this high tribune gives us a unique opportunity to make a strong appeal to the international community not only to accompany us throughout the arduous task of transition but also to provide us with the necessary support for the full achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Access to development credit remains the only way to relaunch the global economy with the necessary conditions for risk mitigation, good governance and the fight against illegal financial flows. The African continent is lagging behind across all human-development indices. However, Africa remains a continent of opportunity for all, with huge mineral resources, vast arable land, forests, rivers and above all a large youth population. As for our country, Sao Tome and Principe remains unequivocally committed within the international community to building a better world for all.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Evaristo do Espirito Santo Carvalho, President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Azali Assoumani, President of the Union of the Comoros

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Union of the Comoros.

Mr. Azali Assoumani, President of the Union of the Comoros, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Azali Assoumani, President of the Union of the Comoros, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Assoumani (*spoke in French*): Before I begin my remarks, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere condolences to the Government and the people of France following the death of Mr. Jacques Chirac, former President of the French Republic, to whose memory and commitment to peace and multilateralism I pay tribute.

I am pleased to warmly congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his election to preside over the Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. I firmly believe that his personal and professional qualities will contribute to the success of our work. Allow me to pay tribute to his predecessor for the efficient way in which she steered the work of the seventy-third session.

I would like to sincerely and acknowledge and thank His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres and the various teams he leads for the efforts they make daily in service to the Organization, which is increasingly faced with challenges that make its work ever more complex.

When our Organization was created, the founding fathers sought international peace and security by means of gradual disarmament, social justice and the well-being of peoples through mutual assistance among nations. Many decades have passed since then. Commitments were made and actions taken to achieve the objectives set more than 70 years ago. Today, it must be recognized that, beyond those initial objectives, new issues and challenges have imposed themselves on our world, which require that we, as the leaders we all are, review our policies and strategies and ensure for present and future generations what our predecessors sought to guarantee by creating the Organization.

I will mention just some of the most recent strategies. The Millennium Summit, held in 2000, raised many hopes for the eradication of poverty and the advent of a better world that was safer — politically, socially and economically. At the time, the Millennium Development Goals benefited from global ownership that foreshadowed a better future for our peoples. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an ideal platform for our collective commitment and on which we can rely for action in the area of development.

By adopting the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations has taken into account all the dimensions of and all elements related to development, in the broadest sense, as well as to the survival of humankind. In this regard, the Union of the Comoros has taken ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals, in all their aspects.

The realities of climate change must be taken seriously, as regions could simply disappear due to the harmful effects of environmental degradation. Although those issues spare no country or region, it should be underscored that the situation with regard to small island developing States is even more worrisome and deserves greater attention.

My country, the Union of the Comoros, is one of those small States that is exposed to climate threats and must therefore continue to address them. In April, our islands were severely affected by Hurricane Kenneth. It devastated nearly 80 per cent of agricultural production and destroyed roads and hundreds of schools, hospitals and homes, causing the forced and improvised displacement of more than 40,000 people out of a population of approximately 800,000 inhabitants. There was considerable internal and external support to address the situation. On behalf of the people and the Government of the Comoros and on my own behalf, I again thank brotherly and friendly countries and the partner institutions of the Comoros for the exemplary solidarity shown in the days immediately following the tragedy.

At the national level, all segments of the population, including civil servants, as well as the private sector, have shown exemplary solidarity and provided multifaceted support to the destitute. Of course, the reconstruction process will be long and difficult. We are also therefore counting on international solidarity to assist the disaster victims.

Like so many others, small island developing States also face other dangerous challenges, such as maritime piracy, human trafficking at sea, drug trafficking, illegal fishing and the plundering of other resources at sea. My Government welcomes and joins all national, regional and international initiatives in the merciless fight against the barbaric acts that threaten the safety and security of our respective populations. In collaboration with various partners, we must step up preventive actions so as to protect our respective populations. In this regard, need we say that such

actions must be collective, coordinated and global in scope, since we know that global challenges can be met only with global responses?

The theme of our session also touches on a key issue — quality education. In future, the leaders of our countries will be only what we decide that they will be. Today's young people — tomorrow's leaders — are looking to us. They have the right to quality education that would ensure that they become worthy leaders of our countries. We must follow up on these recommendations in order to give meaning to the shared commitments to our young people. In this regard, youth entrepreneurship could play a role in economic development and job creation, as, today, many young people tend to view entrepreneurship as a viable and attractive option, given the lack of employment opportunities. In this way, we can prevent the vulnerable segment of the population from falling prey to predators and extremists of all kinds.

Allow me now to inform the Assembly of the new developments in my country, the Union of the Comoros, since our last session, at which I apprised the Assembly, from this rostrum, of the major events that had marked a decisive turning point in our country's socioeconomic context (see A/73/PV.11). Upon the initiative of civil society, national conferences led to a referendum and constitutional reforms. As I had announced, I shortened my term of office, and early elections were held to select the President of the Union and the governors of the islands. The Comorian people again elected me with 59 per cent of the vote, for which I sincerely thank them.

For the first time in the history of the Comoros, a woman was elected to head the governorate of Ngazidja, the largest of the four islands. To complete the electoral process, we are preparing for free and transparent legislative elections in January. I therefore again call on our partners in the international community to support us in this process so that it is transparent and credible.

Above and beyond the mark of political maturity of the Comorian people, the election also promoted the policy of openness that I have always advocated and led, and gender equality, which is one of the causes I continue unrelentingly to champion. Faced with the immediate and lofty task of charting the future of the Union of the Comoros, I decided to work harder than ever to strengthen national unity and social cohesion, without which efforts for harmonious development would be in vain. I have taken measures to appease

social tensions, which have resulted in particular in pardons for many prisoners who had been sentenced to decades or even life in prison, most of whom had been involved in acts against State security. I remain convinced that Comorians, united and in solidarity with each other, will be able to strengthen the gains made in security and to make our country a haven of peace and a pleasant place to live.

Comorians will therefore be able to build and thrive on the recent reclassification by the World Bank, whereby the status of the Union of the Comoros has gone from a least developed country to a middle-income country. In addition, while thanking our various partners for their constant support, I would like to make a solemn appeal to the entire international community to support us further, particularly in organizing the conference of funding agencies and donors for the benefit of my country to be held in Paris in December. I would like to take this opportunity to thank, once again, the President of the French Republic, His Excellency Mr. Emmanuel Macron, for kindly sponsoring the conference and offering to host it in the French capital. Allow me also to thank, in advance, all those who, in a spirit of solidarity, will support the Union of the Comoros in this way.

Also at the national level, the General Assembly has always witnessed the commitment of successive Governments of my country to find a fair solution, in accordance with international law, to the thorny problem of the Comorian island of Mayotte. Indeed, despite this unpleasant dispute between friendly countries, the two sides are fortunately united by a political will for rapprochement and a common commitment. The signature, last July, during an official visit I made to Paris, of a new framework partnership agreement covering several vital areas, cements this willingness on both sides

The promotion of peaceful and fair societies will only be effective if we provide the necessary means to reduce inequality in all its forms. Accordingly, in order to better tackle global problems, it is certainly necessary to harness momentum. However, taking into account the disproportions in various parties' capacities is an essential component not to be forgotten.

In that vein, I cannot close this chapter without referring to the situation in the Near and Middle East, particularly in Syria and Yemen, with particular reference to the brother people of Palestine, as well

as to other peoples who remain, even today, deprived of their most basic rights. Let me say that the illegal occupation of Palestine and the savage repression of the Palestinian people are fuelling extremism on all sides. It is therefore time for the General Assembly, just as it strived for the existence of Israel, to restore the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination through the creation of a Palestinian State, living in peace with the State of Israel, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Union of the Comoros would also like to reaffirm its unwavering commitment to the definitive resolution of the question of the Moroccan Sahara, under the auspices of our prestigious Organization. We trust the Security Council to expedite the resolution of the situation. The Union of the Comoros is also following with interest developments in the Sudan. The Comorian people and Government therefore welcome the progress made recently on the political situation in the Sudan and strongly hope that this brother country will soon regain its stability in the interest of the Sudanese people and of Africa as a whole.

My thoughts also go to all the peoples who live under the threat of terrorism and for whom no development can be envisaged in a context of permanent attacks. Once again, I appeal to everyone to avoid the dangerous conflation of Islam and terrorism, as terrorists are neither Muslim, Catholic, Jewish or animist. Terrorists are just that, terrorists and barbarians, who defy all religions and scorns all civilizations.

The United Nations is seeing its missions multiply with every new challenge that emerges in the world. The Organization must be in a position to cope with them. Human and financial resources are necessary. But, above all, it also needs a new breath of fresh air to address those challenges. Its main organs, in particular the Security Council, must be reformed with a view to its renewal and to the establishment of true universality in the world's most prestigious organization, the United Nations.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Union of the Comoros for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Azali Assoumani, President of the Union of the Comoros, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

**Address by Mr. Lionel Rouwen Aingimea,
President of the Republic of Nauru**

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Nauru.

Mr. Lionel Rouwen Aingimea, President of the Republic of Nauru, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Lionel Rouwen Aingimea, President of the Republic of Nauru, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Aingimea: It is an honour to be in this Hall for the opening of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly. On behalf of the Republic of Nauru, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on his recent assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly. Let me assure him of my delegation's full cooperation and support as he steers our important work during this session. I would also like to thank Her Excellency Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés for her exceptional work as our outgoing President.

As it is my first time appearing before this body as the President of Nauru, allow me to recognize the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, and to commend him for his recent trip to the Pacific. I hope that it will be the first of several visits to our region, as the United Nations strives to become more responsive to the needs of the smallest and the most vulnerable.

The Secretary-General posed an incredibly important question to us in his opening address: referring to a world of disquiet and a growing fear of the people that they are being left behind, he asked: "Do they believe, as leaders, we will put people first?" (A/74/PV.3, p. 1). More than just a question, it was a poignant reminder that we gather here merely as servants of the people. His words should also serve as a challenge to all of us to build a more equitable and responsive Government at home and a more equitable and responsive multilateral system here at the United Nations.

The Secretary-General's challenge resonates strongly in Nauru, where just last month we held elections that saw over half the seats in Parliament change hands. The people of Nauru have spoken

loud and clear that they are seeking change. Indeed, after an economic collapse followed by many years of stagnation, far too many Nauruans have been left behind, and they are hungry for improvements in the quality of their lives. It is the highest priority of my Administration to restore to them what has been lost, return what has been taken and deliver on the promises that have gone unfulfilled for too long. By working with our partners towards our Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate goals, I am confident that my Administration can succeed where previous ones have stumbled. And important work has already begun that promises to transform our country in meaningful ways.

Construction is moving forward on a major upgrade to our maritime port, which promises to deliver a much greater measure of food and energy security, as well as unlock new economic opportunities for the country. Our current arrangement requires that ships be moored at sea, with supplies ferried to shore by smaller vessels. This set-up is incredibly costly, and unpredictable weather can delay shipments of basic goods for days.

Jointly funded by the Green Climate Fund, the Asian Development Bank, Australia and the Government of Nauru, the new port has the potential to become a hub of commerce for our small island and the wider Pacific. Value-added services for fishing and shipping vessels will become viable in Nauru. It will become far easier for ships' crews to disembark, thereby providing local business owners with more business opportunities. The port will also open new markets to our exports and facilitate the development of new trade partners and ventures, all of which will provide a more diversified and reliable revenue stream for our economy.

Our plan is to move forward with port construction in parallel with the development of the interior of our island. The Higher Ground initiative, as it is known, represents a historic opportunity to build our resilience to climate change and sea-level rise by moving housing and critical infrastructure away from our vulnerable coastal areas. An area equal to 80 per cent of our island, topside, rises many meters above sea level and sits undeveloped, providing a veritable blank canvas to reimagine sustainability on small islands. We are in the early stages of developing a master plan, which we look forward to sharing with committed partners in the near future.

A new port facility and the Higher Ground initiative, along with an aggressive push on renewable

energy and efficiency, serve as the major cornerstones of a sustainable-development strategy that has the potential to create good jobs, generate new revenue streams and radically improve our fiscal situation. More importantly, those efforts will finally create a wealth of new opportunities for our youth, something that has gone missing in Nauru for a generation.

The potential upside in Nauru is significant, but there remain some distressing barriers to fully capitalize on that moment. Early this year, Nauru presented its first voluntary national review at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The voluntary-national-review process helped focus attention on the key gaps and challenges in the implementation of our national strategies. Health and education emerged as two areas that require urgent attention.

The President of the General Assembly has highlighted education as a key component of the vision for this session of the General Assembly; so it is too for my country. Teacher retention is a persistent challenge, and student truancy has risen to alarming levels. Also, the lack of good job opportunities that require a diploma has led some families to question the value of a quality education. I will therefore be calling for a review of the education system in Nauru to address the challenges and issues that we face, with a view to putting in place a quality education system that will provide all learners, young and old, with capabilities to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods and enhance individual well-being. But, most importantly, the curriculum will embrace the Nauruan language, cultures and traditions.

A healthy population is equally important to the health of a nation. Nauru suffers from some of the highest rates of non-communicable diseases in the world. Diabetes has taken the lives of far too many friends and family members. Some of this situation can be attributed to the astronomical price of fresh fruits and vegetables on the island, where even basic produce can cost as much as \$16 per kilogram. Our water supply does not meet the standards of the World Health Organization, and we need to upgrade and climate-proof our health-care facilities. We are losing our loved ones and their expertise. We are losing our history. We will require multilateral assistance, or we risk losing our future as well.

The climate crisis is another challenge to our medium- and long-term viability, which is why climate

action has been fully integrated into our development strategy. We take our international obligation to reduce emissions very seriously, but as a small and vulnerable country, our overriding priority must be resilience. Nauru already sits in a drought-prone region of the Pacific, and the frequency of droughts is projected to increase in the future. Improving our water security is therefore a key priority. We do not currently have a modern distribution system, so we rely on trucks to deliver water to on-site storage tanks. Installing new tanks and buying additional trucks can improve the situation in the short term, but our priority must be to install a water- and sewerage-reticulation system, as envisioned in our Nauru Water and Sanitation Master Plan.

Eradicating poverty and improving our way of life also revolves around the development of sustainable energy supplies. The importation of fossil fuels is a massive drain on our national coffers. I am therefore pleased to announce that much progress has been made in reaching our target of generating 50 per cent of our energy from solar power by 2020. This is an incredible feat for our small island, and I must attribute its success to the collaboration with our development partners, namely, the United Arab Emirates, New Zealand, the European Union and the Asian Development Bank, all of which I would like to acknowledge. I thank them very much.

The small island countries of the Pacific, including Nauru, are highly dependent on marine resources for its sustenance and economic development. The tuna fishery is worth \$6 billion annually, and it is one of the best-managed fisheries in the world. I attribute the success to our award-winning organization — the parties to the Nauru Agreement Concerning Cooperation in the Management of Fisheries of Common Interest — and the combined efforts of the Forum Fisheries Agency and the Pacific Community. I must also recognize the contributions of the outstanding men and women of the Nauru Agreement and its member countries, who have been persistent in their efforts and bold in their vision. However, as a word of concern, this fishery is projected to disperse and disappear from the waters of the nine member countries and territories of the Nauru Agreement in the not-too-distant future — another effect of the climate crisis. Sea-level rise is not only about an existential threat to our small and low-lying island. Climate change also threatens an economic Armageddon if the tuna fishery disappears.

With regard to small island developing States (SIDS), we have a very useful plan for improving our efforts in the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway, which highlights our special circumstances and development challenges. As small island developing States, we have always called for genuine and durable partnerships. Partnerships are certainly part of the solution, but they need to be mainstreamed, tailored and SIDS-friendly. Treating everyone the same does not mean that everyone is treated fairly, and this is why we continue to stress the special case of the small island developing States.

We applaud the efforts of the Secretary-General in spearheading the reform of the United Nations development system to be more effective and fit for purpose. The recent review of the multi-country office brings special attention to small islands, including in the establishment of the multi-country office in the North Pacific. For our subregion, this has been long overdue and is a positive step in the right direction towards ensuring longer term in-country engagement for durable institutional-capacity development. We look forward to working closely with the United Nations and our development partners in shaping the future that we want — one that is risk resilient and one where our children have a future.

As already mentioned, Nauru is taking very ambitious domestic action to address climate change, and while there are similar pockets of activity around the globe, the sum total leaves us far short of our goals as set forth in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. After decades of inaction and delay, many dangerous impacts are now unavoidable, all of which are well captured in the special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, entitled *Global Warming of 1.5°C*. In small island developing States, many of those effects have been with us for quite some time. Climate change will be the defining security challenge of the century, and it requires a similarly robust multilateral response. For that reason, Nauru supports the proposal by the Pacific small island developing States to appoint a United Nations special representative for climate and security, whose work must begin with an assessment of the capacity of the United Nations to respond to climate disasters.

It is not enough to proclaim the virtues of multilateralism if we do not strengthen the commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for citizens everywhere. Development is not sustainable

if it is not fair and inclusive. We therefore call on the United Nations to embrace willing and capable partners like Taiwan in its SDG endeavours. Taiwan is ready to share the experience it has accumulated in reaching its level of success with its partner countries, including Nauru. In 2018 alone, Taiwan carried out development projects in various SDG fields.

It is high time that the United Nations lived up to the ideals it espouses. On that note, I want to thank the Government of Cuba for strengthening my country's health sector through the deployment of its very able medical brigade. Yet while that brigade is saving lives in Nauru, its own people continue to suffer extreme and unjust hardships under the economic, commercial and financial embargo that the United States has imposed on Cuba for nearly six decades. We call on the United States not to forget the friendly people of Cuba, who are hurting under its sanctions.

The work of the International Law Commission on the topic of sea-level rise in relation to international law is of tremendous importance and interest for the Pacific region. The issues around baselines and rising seas are critical, and we believe that it is in the interest of all States to give serious consideration to the effects of sea-level rise on the livelihoods of their peoples. Ensuring the security of our oceans is another problem that we must all tackle. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing represents a great threat and serious losses for our small economy. Those issues are enshrined in SDG 14, and in that regard we look forward to the convening of the second United Nations Ocean Conference in Portugal in 2020.

My administration is determined to give more than it receives and committed to being a champion for the weak, the vulnerable and the voiceless, taking nothing from them but rather giving them a better education system, a better health-care regime and renewable energy resources, while helping to equip them to navigate a future that is hopeful yet unpredictable. And while we cannot build that better future alone, we are looking forward to forging the strong partnerships and powerful multilateral system that we require. I am fully aware of the challenges that we face as a Pacific small island developing State, but I can also see the great opportunities that are now within our grasp. Here I would like to recall the words of the Secretary-General, when at the opening of the general debate (see A/74/PV.3) he said, "We the leaders must deliver for we the

peoples". May God bless the Republic of Nauru and may God bless the United Nations.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Nauru for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Lionel Rouwen Aingimea, President of the Republic of Nauru, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. David Panuelo, President and Head of Government of the Federated States of Micronesia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President and Head of Government of the Federated States of Micronesia.

Mr. David Panuelo, President and Head of Government of the Federated States of Micronesia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. David Panuelo, President and Head of Government of the Federated States of Micronesia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Panuelo: I would like to congratulate the President, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande of Nigeria, on his election to lead the General Assembly at this session. I also thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his pivotal role in galvanizing the world to fight climate change and in addressing the challenges of our global community. I have the distinct honour and special pleasure of addressing the Assembly on behalf of the people of the Federated States of Micronesia, from whom I bring warm greetings. As a sovereign State, my country greatly values this opportunity to be able to reach out to every peace-loving nation in the world represented here today.

We are at a critical crossroads. The challenges we are collectively facing as a global community are unprecedented. The Assembly, as the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations, must be innovative and ready to adapt to the emerging realities and issues confronting us. For Micronesia — and this may be the case for most Member States — further strengthening the role of the United Nations in international relations is imperative and indispensable. The role of the United Nations in maintaining peace and stability throughout the world is more crucial than ever, as the world increasingly finds

itself dealing with conflicts, wars, fleeing refugees and closing borders. Many States are turning inwards in the mistaken belief that global unity undermines national sovereignty. Tragically, the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities are often at the mercy of those who could have made constructive and progressive changes. Meanwhile, record-breaking heatwaves, wildfires, king tides and bewildering natural disasters have become prevalent in many parts of the world. Environmental crises in particular have reached a scale and magnitude unprecedented in human history. Our world is becoming complex, our environment is changing and our challenges are becoming more and more daunting.

Micronesia remains committed to extending to others what we seek from every country — peace, cooperation, friendship and love in our common human experience. We are resolute in our belief that there is no greater strength than respect and empathy for other human beings. It is through that resolve that we are committed to global unity in the United Nations, and I appeal to everyone here to show that we are united in our response to our challenges.

As we all know, 22 years have passed since the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol and four since the adoption of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Those agreements appeal strongly to us, the small island developing States (SIDS), as a matter of common sense and survival. For us, climate change and its far-reaching effects and threats to the future of small island developing States are intolerable. Those of us who are from low-lying atolls and coastal areas across the Pacific are living the reality of climate change. That reality has become our nightmare. The chorus of appeals and pleas from this rostrum, particularly from leaders from small island developing States, demonstrates the extent to which our peoples, on the front lines of climate change, are alarmed by its impact on our planet and on the fate of our present and future generations. I believe that actions speak louder than words, and I have told my citizens that our actions today are critical to our country's prosperity tomorrow. In the same way, the world's actions today are critical to our global prosperity tomorrow. Climate change is real, and we must all take the necessary action to ensure our survival.

As Micronesia is addressing the existential threat of climate change, we want to point out that it is impossible to tackle it without protecting the ocean, the

world's largest carbon sink. We have partnered with the Blue Prosperity Coalition to create a comprehensive, climate-smart marine spatial plan for our exclusive economic zone. That partnership will further enhance our national capacity to conserve marine resources and ecosystems, including by establishing marine protected areas in at least 30 per cent of our exclusive economic zone. That marine-protected-area coverage will become one of the world's largest. Micronesia is also committed to strengthening the monitoring and control of fishing activities through the Technology for Tuna Transparency Challenge, in partnership with the Nature Conservancy. The initiative implements electronic monitoring in tuna fisheries to reach the goal of 100 per cent transparency and coverage by 2023.

A few years ago, Micronesia enacted a national law that made it mandatory for all sectors in the national Government to mainstream climate change in all their policies and action plans. That ongoing mainstreaming effort is a first for Pacific island countries and underscores our commitment to addressing climate change in all its aspects. One of the consequences is that extensive solarization has begun in various public and economic sectors throughout Micronesia. Additionally, it was Micronesia that championed the negotiation and adoption of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer to phase down the production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons. Scientists tell us that implementation of the Amendment could lead preventing as much as .5°C of global warming, which is crucial in the light of the recent findings in *Global Warming of 1.5° C*, the special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The Amendment entered into force in January, and we encourage the international community to put that crucial component of the fight against climate change into action.

Moreover, through State legislation we are putting in place a ban on most forms of plastic, thereby reducing our carbon footprint, with a proposed national bill aimed at banning imported plastics on a country-wide scale. Micronesia is also in the process of updating its nationally determined contribution to greenhouse-gas reduction for submission next year. Those are just a few of the initiatives that our country is engaged in to take action today for our world's environmental prosperity tomorrow. We encourage our partners to join us in those efforts, including by providing the necessary support.

I urge the United Nations system, including, and perhaps most importantly, the Security Council, to step up to address climate change as an integral part of its work. The Council must transcend its traditional mandates and address the security implications of climate change, which is the single greatest security issue facing the world at present, and it affects each and every one of us. The General Assembly recently adopted resolution 73/332, calling for greater support and cooperation with the Pacific island countries, and I want to take that a step further. The United Nations was formed to prevent the onslaught of a possible third world war or some other man-made calamity. We are presently in a war against climate change, and it is a war that humankind can win if we first acknowledge the existential threat it poses and if the Security Council treats it as such, because it is in fact a security threat.

We must be radical in combating climate change. It may be very difficult for us, and very painful to make the transition from one lifestyle to another, but we owe it to our future generations across the globe — those who are protesting outside on our streets, the young people who joined the Secretary-General during the Climate Action Summit and all people who depend on us to genuinely and legitimately speak for them — to do what must be done.

A recent United States Department of Defense report stated that the effects of climate change are a national security issue with potential effects on the Department's missions, operational plans and installations. The United States provides for the overall defence of the vast airspace and ocean space of our Freely Associated States, that is, Micronesia, Palau and the Marshall Islands. While the United States, Australia and Japan collectively provide for the overall peace, safety and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region, there is no greater security issue for our Blue Pacific continent than climate change. It is an existential threat to our countries.

No one is immune to climate change, even the most developed countries — such as, for example, the United States. In order to adapt to or minimize the adverse effects of climate change, the United States has invested billions of dollars in coastal areas such as Florida, California, New York and Hawaii, to name only a few. Large countries are vulnerable, too. I have faith in the willingness of the citizens of the United States to keep pushing their Government to embrace renewable energy and become more sympathetic to the

Blue Pacific narrative. We encourage the United States and other leading developed countries to champion the fight against climate change. The United States and its citizens are our true friends and closest ally in our enduring relationship. The meeting of the Presidents of Micronesia, Palau and the Marshall Islands with President Trump in May, and Secretary of State Pompeo's visit to the Federated States of Micronesia in August, demonstrate that our relationship is enduring, special, perpetual and sincere. We look forward to beginning and completing the negotiations on the expiring provisions of our Compact of Free Association.

While it is gratifying to see the United Nations embrace the value of universal membership to address global issues, the realities of the twenty-first century are not adequately addressed by the Security Council's current set-up. In order to improve the Council and ensure that it can respond effectively to the new challenges of a new era, we must work together to reform it. The time has come for that reform to move forward.

As we gather here at the United Nations, it is truly regrettable that we are once again witnessing the far-reaching and apocalyptic effects of climate change, such as the recent devastation inflicted by a hurricane on our sister small island developing State of the Bahamas. It only lends credence to what small island developing States have warned about many for years. It is clear that the ambitious actions on the climate that Member States so urgently require can save the most vulnerable among us. My heart goes out to the Government and the people of the Bahamas during this time of national crisis, and I offer them Micronesia's solidarity and condolences.

I want to take this opportunity to express my personal appreciation to Secretary-General Guterres for his visit to the Pacific region this year, as he is only the second Secretary-General to visit the Pacific small island developing States in the nearly 75-year history of the United Nations. His momentous visit put a spotlight on the climate crisis and the deepening threats to the ocean. I also commend him for leading the Climate Action Summit to raise ambitions and increase action on climate, an issue that is front and centre for all small island developing States and indeed the entire world. The climate disaster, crisis, emergency, threat or whatever one chooses to call it is not just a problem for the small island developing States, Europe or America. It is a problem for all humankind. Together we will save ourselves or together we will all perish.

Beyond the significant importance of close cooperation with our development partners, there are also complementary and significant steps that we are engaging in through South-South cooperation in order to fully realize and implement the Sustainable Development Goals, including with regard to climate change and the ocean.

As a big-ocean State, Micronesia commands a major part of the Pacific Ocean, and we have delineated our maritime zones according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It would be a travesty, however, if our maritime zones and our right to them were challenged or reduced because of sea-level rise, to which we are among those who contribute the least. In that regard, we welcome the International Law Commission's decision earlier this year to study the topic of sea-level rise. I urge the international community to develop State practices that respect the permanence of maritime baselines and zones, irrespective of sea-level rise.

Micronesia is actively participating in the negotiations for a an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. We look forward to concluding those negotiations in 2020 with a durable and practical agreement in place that among other things takes into account the special circumstances of small island developing States and the relevant traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities, and that prevents a disproportionate burden of the conservation and management of resources from falling on small island developing States.

As a big-ocean State, a key concern for my small island country is rightly that of a healthy ocean. The conservation and sustainable use of our ocean is a key driver of our country's sustainable economic development, prosperity, and stability. In that connection, as responsible stewards of the blue Pacific, our leaders have welcomed and committed to the efforts to eliminate marine litter and emphasized the urgency of implementing the Pacific Marine Litter Action Plan, launched last year, which will make a real difference to our ocean's sustainability.

We are a big-ocean State. Our exclusive economic zone constitutes nearly 3 million square kilometres, or one third of the area of Australia. The ocean provides

Micronesia's wealth, whether through our fisheries or our traditional culture of navigating by the stars. As part of the blue Pacific continent, Micronesia is committed by the declaration of the Pacific Island Forum leaders to ensuring the long-term sustainability and viability of the region's fisheries resources, recognizing their centrality to the well-being of our communities and economies. However, the types of challenges that confront our Pacific region require international cooperation to address their stark realities. They include large-scale illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities that ravage healthy fish stocks and undermine our prosperity and economic development. IUU fishing blatantly disregards our national laws, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the region's resolve to sustainably manage and conserve our marine resources. It poses a grave threat to regional security.

Earlier this year, in his report on United Nations development system reform (A/74/73), the Secretary-General expressed his support for the North Pacific, recommending that we establish a dedicated multi-country office to attend to the needs of the five Micronesian countries. A new approach to meeting the challenges of our vast region of the Pacific is clearly of major importance to us in our efforts to implement the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Decisions such as these are hugely important to the greater Micronesian region, and in that regard I would like to emphasize the important role that an on-the-ground multi-country office would play. I also want to express my gratitude to our Secretary-General for his foresight in considering Micronesia a region that deserves greater focus.

We need a United Nations that can meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, dedicated to acting with bold decisions in order to tackle the security threats posed by climate change, to eradicating poverty and resolving armed conflicts, to leading the poor out of poverty and bringing sustainable development to all — in short, a United Nations that leaves no one behind. In the final analysis, the success of the United Nations rests on the collective will of all 193 members of the Assembly. I thank the President of the General Assembly and leaders around the world for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Government and the people of the Federated States of Micronesia. God bless us all.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President and Head of Government of the Federated States of Micronesia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. David Panuelo, President and Head of Government of the Federated States of Micronesia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Arthur Peter Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi, Minister for Defense and Commander-in-Chief of the Malawi Defense Force and the Malawi Police Service

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Malawi, Minister for Defense and Commander-in-Chief of the Malawi Defense Force and the Malawi Police Service.

Mr. Arthur Peter Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi, Minister for Defense and Commander-in-Chief of the Malawi Defense Force and the Malawi Police Service, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Arthur Peter Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi, Minister for Defense and Commander-in-Chief of the Malawi Defense Force and the Malawi Police Service, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Mutharika: At the outset, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. I would like to assure him, my brother, of my delegation's support during this session. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend Her Excellency Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés on her term in office as the fourth female President of the General Assembly. I hope that more women will continue to be elected to the post in future in the pursuit of gender parity. I commend her for her excellent work during the previous session. I also want to convey my condolences to the Government and the people of France on the death of former President Jacques Chirac. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

I would like to begin by listening to the voice of silence, the voice of those who cannot speak but who are waiting for the Assembly to take action. As we speak, many are losing their precious lives because we

cannot protect them. Many are escaping from countries because we cannot protect them. Many helpless children and women are being trafficked and sold like cargo without value. Many vulnerable children are heads of families or unable to go to school.

As an organization, we have urgent work to do. We are a generation with a place in history, a generation with a mission. And let us remember that time has a way of punishing history. If we do not take the right decisions and actions today, in time they may return to haunt us. The United Nations is an organization with a mission in human history. It was founded on three pillars — peace and security, human rights and development. That is our mission and the burden of our generation. It is our turn to do what is right for humankind and our time to make a difference to humankind. And the United Nations is our ultimate weapon to make a difference to human existence. No matter what happens, we should never, ever lose faith in the Organization. Let us agree with Samantha Power that “[w]hatever its flaws, the United Nations is still the only institution that brings together all the countries of the world.”

This year we have met as an alliance of nations determined to fight a common war. We have declared war on poverty, education inequality and climate change, and we have declared that we will fight for the inclusion of minority nations. The world has enough resources to eradicate poverty and to send every child to school. We have the means to slow climate change and save the planet. All we have to do is to think as one humankind, with one goal, and to pool our resources.

But the trouble with multilateralism is that 1 per cent of the world controls 99 per cent of its resources. It is those who control the planet’s resources who are the real decision-makers for humans’ fate on Earth. That global inequality in decision-making undermines the ability of the United Nations to make the world a better place. Poverty eradication remains an elusive objective of the Sustainable Development Goals. Unfortunately, some members of the Assembly use poverty as leverage for controlling other human beings in other places. Many people around the world struggling in poverty are amazingly hard-working individuals. Many leaders in developing countries strive to improve the lives of their people with the best intentions. We all wish our people well.

Africa is not poor through the will of its people. It is the continent that has suffered in the world’s

worst history of exploitation, from slavery through colonialism to the aid regime of the past 60 years. History knows us. We have built empires and cities of the West with our blood, sweat and minerals. Africa has given far more resources to the developed world than it has ever received in aid or philanthropy. Today, the more we strive to build our economies, the more climate change undermines them through disasters and external shocks. And yet the leading architects of climate change are outside the developing countries.

As I speak, poverty thrives in the least-developed countries. Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the worst-affected regions in the world, with more people trapped in poverty than anywhere else on the planet. Africa has a rising population of young people and women, and that booming population of young people and women trapped in poverty is a great danger to the world. Women and children are the worst affected by poverty. Poverty is dehumanizing. It is a tragedy of the people, and in the people’s quest to survive at any cost, poverty is a breeding ground for radicalization in Africa. A radicalized youth in any part of the world poses a threat to every part of the world. That is one of the reasons why we must act collectively and swiftly on poverty. It is why we must empower young people as humankind’s common resource. We can save the world by empowering young people and educating children. The cost of poverty, the cost of radicalized youth and the cost of children bred by ignorance will always outstrip any investment we can make today.

Sadly, there are millions of children across the least-developed countries who cannot access quality education. Many are being left behind by the digital divide. As the United Nations, we therefore cannot claim to be making progress with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development if a significant part of the world population is left behind. We must re-examine the underlying causes of poverty and take concrete measures to address them swiftly. Let us move quickly to empower youth and women. Let us move quickly to eradicate poverty. Let us promote sustainable and equitable economic growth. We must reduce inequities and create greater opportunities for all.

On that account, Malawi has taken pragmatic steps to eradicate poverty in a bid to achieve sustainable development. My Government is implementing the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III, an overarching national development framework that targets the Sustainable Development Goals. We are

pleased with our progress. We are implementing poverty reduction policies and programmes and social support programmes that target Malawi's ultra-poor and vulnerable citizens. We are also providing free access to basic social services such as health and education. In order to sustain those programmes, we have consistently increased our budgetary allocations to the country's key sectors of agriculture, education, health and social welfare. My Government has also developed a national social-support programme to guide the delivery of social protection services. The programme provides a comprehensive social protection response and offers women and children preventive, protective and life-changing interventions in a multisectoral approach. One flagship programme in this category is the social cash transfer programme. This intervention targets women, children and the most vulnerable in our society and provides a predictable cash flow to cushion vulnerable households. We also have an additional top-up value for all school-going learners. This programme has taken people who have lost hope out of poverty, improved school enrolment and retention, and reduced extreme hunger. The programme has so far benefited a total of 1.2 million individuals from 280,000 households, mostly children and female-headed households.

There can never be meaningful development without the inclusion of youth and women. Therefore, my Government has established a number of youth-centred programmes aimed at driving youth empowerment, and we have proven results and testimonies of real lives transformed.

We have focused on empowering young people by teaching them skills. We have introduced a progressive skills-education programme for young people in Malawi who have finished secondary school. We aim to empower the masses of young people who do not have access to university education. We are empowering them with the skills needed to create their own jobs and businesses. We want them to be masters of their destiny.

We are therefore constructing community technical colleges in every part of the country, starting with a community college in every district. Now we are moving to bring a community college to every constituency. Every constituency will have a secondary school and a community technical college. Our goal is to empower young people and create equal opportunities for them all, in every part of the country.

Our youth-empowerment programmes complement our programmes for empowering women. Just as there can never be a society without women, there can never be development if women are not included. We have stepped up the inclusion of women in decision-making, and we have increased social protection measures that target rural women. We now provide soft loans to rural women for them to invest in small and medium businesses, an initiative that now benefits more than 4.5 million women. Our goal is to include women in economic activities.

The United Nations has agreed that education is a human right and the primary responsibility of the State. Every country is doing its best to educate its people. Education creates a human society that understands its own problems and equips the people with the capacity to solve their problems. Investing in education is the best way of investing in all other sectors of society. That is why in Malawi education gets the lion's share of the national budget every year.

We acknowledge the support we get from various stakeholders, including development partners. These include United Nations agencies and civil-society organizations. But we regret that the global commitment on education is now weakening. UNESCO projections warn us that the global community will fail to meet educational commitments unless serious progress is made over the coming decade.

This year's Sustainable Development Goals report indicates that millions of children are still out of school. Worse, not all who attend school are learning. Consequently, many youths cannot fully participate in the highly complex global economy. These educational gaps also threaten an individual's ability to move out of poverty. To fail to prepare young people is to prepare a generation to fail.

But we are the ones failing the global child. The world will pay the heavy cost of breeding poverty and ignorance by having failed the child. Let me remind the Assembly that poverty and ignorance are a breeding ground for the radicalization of young people, and we all suffer the cost of radicalism.

Let the world also remember its commitment to save the only planet on which we live. Climate change is an existential threat. In March, Malawi yet again suffered a devastating national disaster. We were hit by Cyclone Idai together with our Mozambican and Zimbabwean brothers. We lost loved ones, and the infrastructure was

damaged. Cyclone Idai destroyed many people's lives. Malawi needs more than \$370 million to recover. My Government, in collaboration with the United Nations country team and other partners, has so far raised \$45 million for immediate response. This has gone into food, temporary shelters, relocation and medication. But we still have a huge deficit that calls for more support from the international community.

Malawi plays its role in international peacekeeping with diligence. We are proud to sacrifice our scarce resources for the humanitarian cause of keeping others safe wherever they may be. As a peaceful country, we consider ourselves ambassadors of peace. We are proud that the Malawi Defense Force has always been professional and effective wherever it has gone on United Nations peacekeeping missions. Our military is the pride of the nation, and we are proud to find our place in the United Nations family and play our role. We must all work to make the world a safe place and to provide security to the vulnerable and the voiceless.

Malawi is understood to be a poor country. But we are testimony to the fact that small or poor countries can play a significant role in the affairs of the United Nations. I repeat what I said before: there are no small or poor nations in the United Nations; all we have are nations of the United Nations. In fact, the Organization would be more powerful and more effective if we all participated in decision-making on security. But for some reason, there are nations that refuse to share power with African nations.

In this regard, the United Nations is undemocratic. And yet those same countries and the United Nations are preachers of the gospel of democracy in Africa, although African countries are sometimes more democratic than Western countries.

Let me therefore call upon the United Nations to implement Security Council reform. Africa must be on the Security Council. I repeat: Africa must be on the Security Council. We cannot ignore and marginalize an entire continent of 1.3 billion people; that is unacceptable. We cannot marginalize and repress one third of the Member nations of the Organization. It is a travesty that we are meeting to galvanize multilateral efforts even as we marginalize and repress other Member States.

I therefore urge the United Nations and the permanent five in particular to open up Security Council membership, increase the number of permanent

seats with veto power and make the Security Council truly representative of all States Members of the United Nations.

Africa will never relent on this position, which is for the good of the United Nations and the global community as a whole. The more we allow a few nations to monopolize power in the Security Council, the more undemocratic the United Nations looks. This cannot be allowed in this day and age. Let us be the change we want to see in the world.

Let me conclude by making what should have been my opening remarks. My country is a proud Member of the Organization, and we are thankful for the role that the United Nations plays in my country. This year, Malawi had an election, and I am in my second term of office. The process was duly audited by a United Nations-affiliated network, BDO Jordan, and the election was unanimously declared free, fair and credible by the European Union, the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the Commonwealth observer missions. But the opposition, led by the Malawi Congress Party, decided not to accept that very credible election. This is the party that ruled Malawi under a dictatorship for 31 years. This time it went to court, but ignored the court process and waged a vicious campaign of violence in the guise of demonstrations. Its violence betrayed a desire for ethnic cleansing and civil war, and an attempt to destroy the economy and make Malawi an ungovernable State of lawlessness. We responded with peaceful resistance and insisted on the rule of law. We fought violence with peace and hate with love. That is what saved Malawi from descending into chaos. We have seen democracy and the rule of law at their best in Malawi. Malawi remains the peaceful and stable country that we have always known, and a beautiful destination for tourists and investors. Malawi is a beautiful place where we fight to make life better for everyone.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Malawi, Minister for Defense and Commander-in-Chief of the Malawi Defense Force and the Malawi Police Service for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Arthur Peter Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi, Minister for Defense and Commander-in-Chief of the Malawi Defense Force

and the Malawi Police Service, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Charles Angelo Savarin, President of the Commonwealth of Dominica

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

Mr. Charles Angelo Savarin, President of the Commonwealth of Dominica, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Charles Angelo Savarin, President of the Commonwealth of Dominica, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Savarin: I would first like to extend our sincere congratulations to President Muhammad-Bande on his appointment and to wish him a successful, satisfying and productive tenure.

We live at a critical and defining moment in the history of our planet, and decisions and commitments made under this presidency will be as important as any made before in determining our collective stewardship of the planet and the quality of life of all for whom it is home.

My delegation and I also recognize our fellow Caribbean Community (CARICOM) sister State, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and congratulate it on its election as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the period from 2020 to 2022. As the smallest nation State ever to accomplish that historic feat, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines gives assurance to all small States that they too can sit as equals among much larger, richer and more powerful Member States and ensure that their voices are heard on matters affecting global interests and security.

I want to convey my warmest greetings to everyone here from the grateful people of the Commonwealth of Dominica. We are profoundly thankful for all the attention and support from the Organization and its Member States and specialized agencies in the aftermath of the massive devastation inflicted on us by the category 5 Hurricane Maria in September 2017. Two years ago, when Dominica lay in ruins after being ravaged by Maria, our Prime Minister, Mr. Roosevelt Skerrit, stood at this rostrum a mere

five days later to address the Assembly and indicated his resolve to set Dominica on a path to becoming the first climate-resilient nation in the world. Our Climate Resilience Recovery Plan is nearing completion, our new implementing agency is fully operational and the work of building resilience has begun. Thousands of homes have been repaired or rebuilt and hundreds more are contracted to be built. New resilient housing units are being constructed all over the island. The public utilities have all been restored. All children have been back in school since January 2018, although some schools still have to be rebuilt. The road network has been vastly improved, and most of the damaged or destroyed bridges have been repaired or are being rebuilt to higher standards. The rivers and watercourses have been dredged and the greenery has returned to our hills, valleys and mountains.

Practically everyone visiting Dominica in recent times has described the country's transformation after Maria as miraculous, and indeed it is. But we acknowledge that we have not done it alone. We are doing it together. The global community, including non-governmental organizations and faith-based organizations, many of which are still hard at work in Dominica as I speak, is playing its part. All of Dominica says thanks, and we recognize that we owe the global community an everlasting debt of gratitude. We also hasten to say that the task is far from complete. Building resilience is a momentous and expensive task. One of the deficiencies of the international system is the long gestation period between pledges and commitments and the delivery on those promises. We urge those who have pledged to support us in creating this new, climate-resilient nation to deliver. Time is of the essence.

As we meet, more and more evidence is emerging that a new chapter is being written by the forces of nature, and the evidence is right before our eyes. That chapter speaks to the catastrophic effects of climate change, and as we are deliberating this week, many countries are reeling from its devastating effects. For many island States, and particularly the smallest, the message being sent is that rising sea levels, violent tropical storms and hurricanes, periods of severe drought alternating with floods and forest fires, new plant diseases, and vector-borne diseases such as chikungunya and Zika present an existential threat. The time for action is now.

Competent scientific authorities are now advising that the rate of global warming is progressing faster

than was originally believed. The effects of climate change are cross-cutting, affecting every sector and every facet of life on earth. Despite the commitments they have made to take action to slow the rate of global warming, too many countries continue to pursue the same policies that are contributing to nature's angry response to our overindulgence and reckless exploitation of our planet's resources. If the devastating effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria did not convince us in 2017, we can look to the calamity of Hurricane Dorian in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas just a few weeks ago. Dominica stands in solidarity with the people of Abaco and Grand Bahama, two of the island communities of the Bahamas archipelago whose lives and livelihoods have been devastated by the destructive forces of the category 5 Hurricane Dorian, which inflicted total destruction and considerable loss of life.

As experts predicted, such tropical storms are becoming more frequent and more intense, and sea temperatures are rising. What they did not predict is that a storm of such ferocity could virtually sit over an island, wreaking incalculable havoc for some 40 hours. We are left with no choice but to accept that category 5 hurricanes may become the new norm. We therefore have to go back to the drawing board to reassess national approaches to risk mitigation and disaster preparedness.

It is not only on small island States, however, that climate change is having an impact. We are seeing heart-wrenching reports and disturbing images of flooded cities and severe droughts that are driving millions from their traditional homes and occupations. The results are homelessness, starvation and mental anguish. Soon the phenomenon of climate refugees will also be a new norm. Then there is the problem of forest fires, not just in Brazil and the Amazon but here in the United States, in Europe and in the Far East. When fire strikes a neighbourhood, we do not hold a meeting to determine whether our neighbours are insured. We call out the fire brigade. That is what we need now — urgent action. Our planet is on fire and we must take immediate steps to quell it.

Dominica reaffirms its commitment to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and once again pleads for the resources pledged to be released, so that we can implement actions designed to reduce risks and mitigate the impacts of climate change. We applaud the leadership shown by the Government of the United Kingdom in assisting countries such as Dominica in building greater resilience to the effects of climate

change. We thank the nations that have recently committed to doubling their pledges and increasing contributions to the Green Climate Fund, as well as to making further resources available to small island developing States to help us adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. However, the issues of accessibility and timely disbursement of funds must be addressed if our urgent needs are to be met.

In pursuit of its vision of becoming the world's first climate-resilient nation, we have prepared a national resilience development strategy, which is a broad framework providing a road map and guidelines to enable Dominica to reach climate resilience by 2030. The targets, and our plans to achieve them, are articulated in greater detail and precision in the sector strategies. The strategy is a live document that will be adjusted and updated every four years, based on annual monitoring and evaluation exercises and on data emerging from new studies and surveys.

Following Hurricane Maria, which caused damage and loss estimated at 226 per cent of our gross domestic product, urgent priority was assigned to rebuilding the country and to building back better. However, experience had taught us that a new approach to project management and implementation had to be adopted if our intended targets were to be met in a timely manner. To help us to overcome that potential challenge, in 2018 the Government established an execution agency to enable Dominica to develop its Climate Resilience Recovery Plan, coordinate reconstruction work and facilitate the smooth and efficient implementation of projects. My Government is most appreciative of the support provided by the bilateral partners who worked with us in setting up the execution agency, and we are especially grateful to the British Government, operating through the Department for International Development, to Canada and to the World Bank for their support in its establishment and operation.

Dominica is by any measure an insignificant contributor to greenhouse-gas emissions. Notwithstanding that, we believe our actions must match the spirit of the climate conventions we have signed. We have therefore developed a low-carbon, climate-resilient development strategy that emphasizes the development and use of renewable energy both to fuel our development and as a means of earning export revenue. Our recently completed resilient and sustainable energy plan confirms that Dominica is in a position to generate about 90 per cent of the country's

electricity needs by 2029 using renewable, primarily geothermal, sources; realize a reduction in the annual cost and volume of diesel fuel used for electricity generation by 94 per cent; and reduce the total cost of generating electricity between 2020 and 2038 by at least 44 per cent.

Serious initiatives to exploit the country's geothermal potential began in 2008, with financial support coming mainly from the European Union and the Government of France. Following extensive geothermal exploration, it was confirmed in 2012 that the reservoir in the Roseau Valley, the subject of exploration, had a potential of 120 megawatts, which would not only satisfy domestic needs but could potentially produce electricity for export to the neighbouring French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, thereby reducing their carbon footprint as well. That painstaking work, conducted over six years, is an example of the arduous effort involved in developing a renewable resource such as geothermal power in order to reduce the associated risks and cause a bankable project to emerge. Notwithstanding fiscal challenges along the way, the Government stuck to its commitment to providing initial funding for the project. As the project stands today, a financing package totalling \$27 million has been signed with the World Bank for the construction of an initial 7 megawatt geothermal plant. Construction will most likely begin early in the new year.

Dominica, like all the CARICOM countries, is committed to the principle of preserving the Caribbean as a zone of peace. It is inevitable that from time to time differences will arise between and among various interest groups within a State. While we will always be available to act as mediators in resolving internal conflicts, we believe in and will forever adhere to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. We hold that to be a universal principle, not one to be selectively employed and discarded when ideological differences arise. Wherever there are uneasy tensions among States and differences in interpretations of the Constitution within a State that trigger civil unrest, we call for restraint and resorting to the negotiations table and dialogue to resolve such differences. The other options only serve to prolong and intensify human misery and suffering and violate the principles on which this august body was founded.

The climate is at war with our States Members. Let us not aggravate the situation by creating hostility and war among ourselves, particularly in this hemisphere.

We support the One China policy and call for dialogue to achieve the peaceful reunification of China. We support dialogue and negotiations to bring about the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. We support dialogue and negotiations to resolve the disputes in the Middle East, including the possibility of a nuclear arms race.

We once again call for an end to the unjustified continued economic blockade against Cuba in order to free up the vast potential of the Cuban people so that they can take up their rightful role in the global economy and trade system. We also call for an end to the unilateral sanctions imposed against Venezuela, which we believe are serving no useful purpose and rather serve to cause misery and suffering to the Venezuelan people. We continue to call for dialogue and for countries to support peaceful mediation among the disputing parties within Venezuela to achieve an outcome that will serve the best interests of all Venezuelans.

Let us all adhere to the provisions of Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations, particularly in this hemisphere, where we should aspire to become a zone of peace and development.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Commonwealth of Dominica for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Charles Angelo Savarin, President and Head of Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Ismaël Omar Guelleh, President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti.

Mr Ismaël Omar Guelleh, President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ismaël Omar Guelleh, President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Guelleh (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on his commendable election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. We firmly believe that his diplomatic skills, erudition and extensive experience will enable him to manage the Assembly's heavy workload. In that regard, I wish to express the firm commitment and full readiness of my delegation to cooperate with him and his office during the current session.

Allow me also to express our sincere thanks to Ms. María Espinosa Garcés and her team for their outstanding work during the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. We will build on the passionate dedication to promoting multilateralism that she demonstrated during her term as President. In statements steeped in rich vocabulary and culture, she always inspired us and showed that poetic speech and political thought can be intimately connected. I also wish to express our deep gratitude to the Secretary-General for the commendable actions and efforts that he, his special representatives and all United Nations personnel are undertaking in very difficult situations and environments throughout the world.

We gather today in a troubling context in which multilateralism, itself firmly based on international cooperation, is under constant attack. That crisis situation is all the more paradoxical as it comes at a time when the interdependence among the countries of the world has never been as close. Global challenges therefore require global collective action. Multilateral action is vital and urgently needed.

It is only collectively that we can find solutions to the global challenges of poverty, inequality and climate change. Although those challenges affect everyone to varying degrees, the poorest countries are the most vulnerable owing to their insecurity. The current geopolitical upheavals, the rising tensions caused by the trade war and forecasts of declining global economic growth have generated risks and are raising doubts about our ability to mobilize the necessary resources to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

The reports of the World Bank highlight a worrisome weakness in the volume of investment and the negative impact that it could have on the implementation of the SDGs. Those developments are regrettable given that, when the potentially transformative agenda was adopted,

we were aware that we should not only adopt a radically different approach but also secure a volume of funding in the trillions of dollars. It is therefore incumbent on us all to share resources, while taking into account the effectiveness of their impact on sustainability.

Governments must improve their business climates to attract investment that will foster sustainable development. The private sector must focus its efforts not on short-term but long-term investments. It will also be a question of us seeking together innovative solutions to secure financing for the SDGs.

As early as February 2014, Djibouti introduced compulsory health insurance for the working segment of its population and a social health-care assistance programme for all persons who are known to have no source of income. Over the past five years, significant efforts to shore up that insurance and make it available to migrant and refugee populations residing in Djibouti have been made.

Djibouti therefore reaffirms its commitment to meeting target 3.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals, "Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all", of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Djibouti is also determined to transition to an integrated, patient-centred, computerized health-care system in its development of universal health insurance leading to universal health-care coverage, thereby creating the necessary conditions for a more effective health-care data system.

Djibouti is further determined to combat all forms of inequality, especially those relating to gender inequality, by placing that goal at the core of its political agenda. Through structural reforms, the Government is pursuing its vital work towards the eradication of the political, economic and social obstacles faced by women. In that connection, we enacted a law at the beginning of the year that raised the quota of women in the National Assembly of Djibouti from 10 to 25 per cent.

Climate change is the most threatening and serious challenge of our time. Our thoughts turn in particular to our brothers and sisters in the Bahamas who have been devastated by the destructive hurricane that caused death and desolation on an unprecedented scale. We reiterate our gratitude to the Secretary-General for

the many initiatives that have been taken to continue drawing attention to a phenomenon whose consequences are catastrophic. The extensive discussions that were held at the Climate Action Summit made it possible to identify the concrete actions to be taken.

The holistic shift towards peace in the Horn of Africa continues. Our countries' determination to consolidate the gains that have been made is growing stronger every day. Our conviction that total and lasting peace in our region is possible is also becoming stronger every day. The latest good news comes from the Sudan, a neighbouring and brother country. We welcome the success of the negotiations that led to a peaceful resolution of the crisis and the signing of a power-sharing agreement.

The progress that has been made with regard to the peace process in South Sudan is encouraging. The various talks held between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Mr. Riek Machar constitute a significant development. We note in particular the renewal of their commitment to forming a transitional Government by 12 November. In its capacity as a member of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Djibouti will continue to urge the parties to pursue efforts to break the political deadlock and implement the commitments that have been made.

With regard to Somalia, despite the tensions related to political dynamics in the context of elections in the member states of the Federal Republic and the acts of violence perpetrated by Al-Shabaab, we are encouraged by the progress that has been made on the economic and security fronts. We must redouble our efforts to help Somalia achieve its primary objectives — holding federal elections, enhancing security, implementing ambitious economic reforms and obtaining debt relief. We must do everything possible to ensure that the positive regional momentum contributes to efforts to stabilize the country and implement its ongoing transition plan, thus helping to create an environment conducive to national reconciliation.

We remain confident that relations between Djibouti and Eritrea will improve even further and that the outstanding issues will be definitively resolved. Djibouti remains deeply committed to peace and the promotion of sound and robust bilateral solutions with all its neighbours. We must work tirelessly together to accelerate efforts to promote regional integration. In that regard, we commend the dedication with which

Mr. Abiy Ahmed, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, is working to bring the views of Djibouti and Eritrea closer together.

Terrorism is an existential threat to the peace and security of our countries. We cannot allow innocent civilians to be massacred and mutilated under false pretences. As Africans, the situation in the Sahel is of the utmost concern to us. We reaffirm our support for, and solidarity with, all the Sahel countries that are faced with that grave danger and are making significant efforts within the framework of the Group of Five for the Sahel. We urge the international community to mobilize the necessary financial resources to support those efforts. In that regard, we welcome the outcomes of the Extraordinary Summit of the Economic Community of West African States that was held on 14 September.

We strongly condemn the 14 September attack that targeted oil processing facilities in Saudi Arabia. That serious incident directly undermined the de-escalation that the international community has been advocating.

We are also extremely concerned about the deteriorating health situation and the increased risk of fragmentation in Yemen. We reiterate our solidarity with the legitimate authorities of Yemen and commend their political will to continue their efforts to implement the Stockholm Agreement in spite of the negative developments that have harmed the political climate. Djibouti will continue to welcome its Yemeni brothers and sisters, whose country is facing an unprecedented humanitarian tragedy. Djibouti has been generously welcoming Yemeni refugees to its territory since the crisis began and will continue to do so.

The surge of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories is increasingly clouding the prospects for a two-State solution. Those settlements constitute a violation not only of international law, in particular article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, but also of the human rights of the Palestinians. We also strongly condemn Israel's recently announced plans to annex the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea to extend its sovereignty in the occupied West Bank.

(spoke in English)

In June 2020, the Assembly will hold elections for five non-permanent seats on the Security Council for the term 2021-2022, one of which is allocated to Africa. In line with the African Group's tradition of subregional rotation, that seat should be occupied by an

East African State. In accordance with African Union law, it is undisputable that Djibouti be the African Group's candidate for the seat on the Security Council for the term 2021-2022. The principle of rotation ensures that all African States, large or small, have equal opportunity to serve on the Security Council and other United Nations bodies.

In that regard and out of respect for the sovereign equality of States, Djibouti respectfully urges all Member States to support its candidature for the Security Council for the term 2021-2022. If elected, Djibouti will resolutely promote the obligation of all States to uphold international law and maintain peace and security, and will advocate for the recommitment to a multilateral, rules-based international order.

(spoke in French)

We must pool our efforts and resources and create safe and stable conditions in order to consolidate multilateralism. Failure is not an option. That is why we support the Alliance for Multilateralism, an initiative launched by Germany and France.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ismaël Omar Guelleh, President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

General debate

Address by Mr. Taban Deng Gai, First Vice-President of the Republic of South Sudan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the First Vice-President of the Republic of South Sudan.

Mr. Taban Deng Gai, First Vice-President of the Republic of South Sudan, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Taban Deng Gai, First Vice-President of the Republic of South Sudan, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Gai (South Sudan): It is my honour to address the General Assembly again on behalf of His Excellency

Mr. Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan, who could not be present today given his busy schedule back at home. Our President is engaged in consolidating and streamlining the peace implementation process, as the pre-transitional period is ending soon and a new Government of National Unity will be formed by 12 November.

I am honoured to be accompanied in my delegation by senior members of the political parties that are signatories to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. It is a demonstration of visionary leadership on the part of my President, who directed that they should be included in South Sudan's delegation to the General Assembly. I believe such an astute decision deserves recognition, as it is through cooperation among the leaders of South Sudan that a peaceful South Sudan can be realized and emerge as a beacon of hope and peace. To this end, I urge the international community and States Members of the United Nations to support the effort to bring the non-signatories to the peace agreement on board.

The Government and the people of the Republic of South Sudan wish to convey to the Government and the people of Zimbabwe, and the African Union, our heartfelt condolences on the loss of the iconic pan-African leader, Mr. Robert Gabriel Mugabe. His revolutionary role and dedicated statesmanship, in the solidarity movement in particular, will live on as a highlight of his exceptional legacy.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session, and the Federal Republic of Nigeria on holding this position for the second time. The Republic of South Sudan affirms its commitment to playing its role in supporting the implementation of the agenda the President has set for this historic session. The theme he has selected for this session — “Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion” — strongly resonates not only in my country, but throughout the world at large.

Poverty remains endemic worldwide, and there are direct correlations between poverty, lack of education, unemployment and political instability. We are grateful for the commitments made by our development partners to reduce poverty in the Republic of South Sudan. More support is needed if we are to make an effective

contribution towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government of the Republic of South Sudan has initiated different programmes, policies and development initiatives to address and alleviate poverty.

On climate change, the Government of the Republic of South Sudan has updated its nationally determined contribution and will embark on a clean development trajectory by investing in clean energy, by producing 1,000 megawatts of power from hydro, solar, wind and geothermal energy sources and enhancing the resilience of its people by embarking on a smart-climate approach to agriculture. The Government of the Republic of South Sudan is also planning to take part in the Great Green Wall project that is being spearheaded by the African Union to halt the advancement of the Sahara desert southwards. In addition to this, we have taken many steps towards implementing a programme to plant 100 million trees over a period of five years, which translates to approximately 20 million trees every year.

I now wish to draw the attention of the Assembly and the African Union to the continued issue of Lake Chad drying up. An immediate solution is needed to resolve this problem. Getting more water into Lake Chad should be a priority for all of us. I firmly believe that, once there is more water in Lake Chad, the advancement of the Sahara Desert southwards will be significantly stemmed.

We firmly believe that, as Nelson Mandela stated, “education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world”. The Republic of South Sudan is using education to transform the lives of our children and youth. We are happy to announce that we are making progress in our national education policy, which addresses the issues of access, equity, gender parity and quality education, and we are intending to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 through these strategies. We have developed a new national curriculum, with school-based peace clubs as one of the key initiatives. We have trained 400 teachers as pedagogues in peace education and the prevention of violent extremism.

We wish to express our deep gratitude to our development partners, especially the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the European Union, the United States Agency for International Development, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the China International

Development Cooperation Agency, Norway, the Netherlands, the World Food Programme, UNICEF, UNESCO, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Global Partnership for Education and the African Development Bank, among others, for their support for education in the Republic of South Sudan. Nevertheless, we still face many challenges and we need the support of the international community to enable us to continue expanding access to education to the millions of children who are still not in school.

On the peace-implementation process, I would like to highlight some of the successes that we have seen on the path to peace and stability. Last year, I stood here representing a country that many sceptics considered to be on the brink of deteriorating into violent conflict, doubting whether the peace agreement would hold or not (see A/73/PV.12). It is my distinct pleasure to inform the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly that the Republic of South Sudan is heading towards lasting peace and stability. This is demonstrated by the ongoing implementation process of the Revitalized Peace Agreement and the willingness of all parties to work in Juba towards a permanent resolution of the conflict in the Republic of South Sudan.

I wish to inform the Assembly of a historic spiritual retreat for all South Sudanese leaders at the Vatican at the invitation of His Holiness Pope Francis. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland were also in attendance. The retreat gave fresh impetus to the quest to restore peace and stability in the Republic of South Sudan.

The prayers did not stop in Rome; the leaders of the South Sudan Council of Churches and the South Sudan Islamic Council are leading the diverse faith groups in the healing and reconciliation process and are providing spiritual guidance as we implement the peace agreement. On 19 September, the Government of the Republic of South Sudan held a national day of prayer in the spirit of supporting this critical process of national healing and reconciliation. I wish to commend the role being played by spiritual leaders, in particular the Archbishop of the Catholic Church in Juba, Paulino Lukudu Loro; the Moderator of the South Sudan Presbyterian Church, the Right Reverend Peter Gai Lual Marrow; and Right Reverend Justin Badi Arama of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan. In addition, I also wish to commend the role of Sheikh Juma Saeed Ali, the Presidential Adviser on Islamic Affairs, as well as

the leadership of the South Sudan Islamic Council and all religious and spiritual leaders within the Republic of South Sudan.

The successful face-to-face meeting, held in a friendly atmosphere between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Mr. Riek Machar in Juba earlier this month, offered an opportunity to deliberate on critical pending issues to pave the way for the formation of the new Government of National Unity by 12 November. The engagement of the different stakeholders is critical to the success of the peace agreement in the Republic of South Sudan. The visit of Mr. Riek Machar and his delegation in Juba last month was a very important milestone and brought much-needed confidence to the leaders of the different political parties and the citizens of the Republic of South Sudan. This is a move in the right direction towards achieving lasting peace.

Since the signing of the Revitalized Peace Agreement, the overall security situation in the Republic of South Sudan is stable. The Government and the parties to the agreement have worked diligently within the various mechanisms set up under the National Pre-transitional Committee to implement the provisions of the Revitalized Peace Agreement. In this context, the Chief of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition are, together, leading and carrying out field visits to their respective forces to sensitize them about peace and prepare them for life in cantonments, which are now operational. Training centres have commenced their work as of 17 September, in accordance with the provisions of the Revitalized Peace Agreement.

In addition to the aforementioned peace initiatives, the national dialogue at various levels and grassroots, regional, national and people-to-people peace initiatives have made significant strides towards reconciliation and healing among the diverse communities in the Republic of South Sudan. The outcomes of the consultative dialogues held in the three regions of the Republic of South Sudan will soon be discussed at a national conference. It is our firm belief that the complementary three-track approach of the people-to-people peace initiatives, the national dialogue and the implementation of the peace agreement is the way to consolidate peace on the ground, ensure democracy and accountability and fight impunity in the Republic of South Sudan.

South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries and the internally displaced persons living in United Nations protection-of-civilians sites are voluntarily returning in large numbers to their respective States and homes. However, there is an urgent need to provide them with support mechanisms to ensure an easy transition and reintegration into their communities. This support includes transport for the returnees, the delivery of food to their respective areas, health care, clean water and educational services.

On humanitarian access, all indicators show that the humanitarian trend in the country has remarkably improved due to intensified collaboration between the Government, United Nations agencies and development partners. There are no longer delays in the delivery of humanitarian aid, as convoys are cleared instantly at the entry points.

Before I conclude, the Government and the citizens of the Republic of South Sudan would like to congratulate our brothers and sisters in the Republic of the Sudan for showing the patriotism and exemplary leadership needed to amicably resolve the political impasse that many feared would get out of hand. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the new Prime Minister of the Republic of the Sudan, His Excellency Mr. Abdalla Hamdok, for winning the confidence of the Transitional Military Council and the Forces for Freedom and Change to lead the interim Government. For the success of the interim Government in the Sudan, we call for the lifting of all sanctions imposed against the Republic of the Sudan and the removal of the Republic from the list of countries supporting terrorism. We also call for the cancellation of all of the Sudan's debts and the normalization of trade and economic relations.

I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate that we are one people in two independent countries, united through our historical, cultural and social ties. Accordingly, the Republic of South Sudan will always seek to maintain a very strong relationship with the Sudan. This reality led His Excellency Mr. Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan, to take it upon himself to facilitate peace talks between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudanese armed opposition groups. A road map to realize this effort was signed in Juba on 12 September. Further peace negotiations between the parties are scheduled to commence in Juba on 14 October for a final peace settlement.

We look forward to working with the new Government of the Republic of the Sudan in addressing the pending issues in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2005. Chief among those issues are the demarcation of our common border and the settlement of the final status of Abyei. The Government of the Republic of South Sudan is gravely concerned about the security situation in Abyei. We applaud and appreciate Security Council resolutions 2445 (2018) and 2469 (2019). We have considered most of the Secretary-General's recommendations for the reconfiguration of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and for charting an exit strategy. We are still looking forward to the implementation of the provisions of the aforementioned resolutions, and especially urge the Secretary-General to accelerate the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission for UNISFA. In this regard, we repeat our request to the African Union Peace and Security Council and the United Nations Security Council to finally endorse the African Union High-level Implementation Panel proposal of 21 September 2012 on Abyei. In seeking support and backing from the Security Council in this matter, we urge it to expedite its work towards determining the final status of Abyei.

In conclusion, the President of the Republic of South Sudan, His Excellency Mr. Salva Kiir Mayardit, is fully committed to the implementation of the signed Revitalized Peace Agreement. Together with the parties to the Revitalized Peace Agreement, the President is ready to form a new Government of National Unity on 12 November. The Transitional Government of National Unity will continue to consolidate peace, including preparations for the elections scheduled at the end of the transition period. We call upon the Assembly to extend its much-needed support to the new incoming Government.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the First Vice-President of the Republic of South Sudan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Taban Deng Gai, First Vice-President of the Republic of South Sudan, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mrs. Isatou Touray, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia.

Mrs. Isatou Touray, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming Her Excellency Mrs. Isatou Touray, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia, and inviting her to address the Assembly.

Mrs. Touray (Gambia): On behalf of His Excellency President Adama Barrow and the people of the Gambia, let me express our sincere gratitude to Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés for her excellent leadership during the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. In a similar vein, the Gambia welcomes the presidency of the General Assembly of Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande with hope and excitement. I assure him that our support will be unwavering throughout his tenure. We also thank the Secretary-General for his strong leadership and reform initiatives during one of the toughest periods we have ever seen, where multilateralism is experiencing unprecedented assaults.

Allow me to take this opportunity to extend to the President of the General Assembly the warmest greetings and best wishes from His Excellency Mr. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of the Gambia, who would have loved to be here in person but, due to other State matters, could not. He has asked that I extend to the General Assembly his sincere apologies and best wishes for a successful seventy-fourth session.

Today, I speak to the Assembly with a heavy heart. Fifty-four years ago, on 21 September 1965, our founding father and first president, the late Mr. Alhaji Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, saw the Gambia ushered in as a State Member of the United Nations. He was a beloved leader, a Pan-Africanist, a statesman, a global citizen and a true champion of human rights and the rule of law. He dedicated his life to the search for peace around the world. We mourn the demise of this colossus of a human being and commit ourselves, as a Government and a people, to preserving and celebrating his enduring legacy.

The theme that the President has chosen for our general debate — “Galvanizing multilateral efforts for

poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion” — is indeed very relevant for our times. In the light of the multiplicity of the challenges facing the international community today, we cannot afford the enormous cost associated with weak multilateral institutions or inadequate multilateral action.

No country can single-handedly solve the challenges of global inequality, terrorism or climate change. For those of us coming from the developing world, we strongly support the work of our multilateral institutions and efforts geared towards finding collective solutions to our development and security needs. As developing countries, most of us are in special situations that require special development plans that would benefit from initiatives, experiences and best practices harnessed through South-South and triangular cooperation. As we strive to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, therefore, let us collectively galvanize new resources, new efforts and innovative ideas and approaches so as to ensure that no one is left behind.

In the Gambia, we understand the critical difference that multilateral efforts can make in transforming a society teetering on the brink of despair into one of hope and a model for emulation. The story of the new Gambia started in December 2016, when the people ushered in a new era of democracy, freedom and the rule of law. As a Government, we launched a plethora of reforms in governance, transitional justice and prudent fiscal and economic management. Today, we can proudly report that our reforms are bearing fruit and yielding positive dividends.

Our constitutional review commission has concluded consultations with Gambians at home and abroad. For the first time in our history, we have a national human rights commission to address the human rights concerns of the people. As a result of a number of informed policy decisions and actions since the advent of the new Government in 2017, the Gambia is back again as the human rights capital of Africa — a small country with a big voice on matters of human rights on the continent and beyond.

Mr. Al Hassan (Oman), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In the area of transitional justice, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission is now functional and addressing past human rights violations of the former Government, with the active participation of victims and perpetrators. The Commission has also

consulted with the Gambian diaspora as an important constituency in our quest for inclusiveness and national reconciliation. With the setting up of the Commission and the revelations that have come from public hearings, Gambians have now awakened to the true extent of the crimes and egregious violations of human rights wilfully committed by a Government against its own people.

Stories of egregious human rights violations like extrajudicial, killings, disappearances, rape and torture were mere stories until now. This is no longer the case thanks to the collaborative work that the international community is doing with the Government today. In this regard, sustaining the ongoing collaboration and support will remain critical to the success of our efforts in instituting accountability for past crimes and generating a historic record for transitional justice in the Gambia, which, in our view, will contribute to healing, national reconciliation and closure for society at large.

As part of our broad reforms and major national priorities, we have now created a separate Ministry for Women’s Affairs, Children, and Social Welfare to address the concerns of women and children and wider social inclusion. Women’s empowerment, education of the girl child, ending gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls, ensuring effective and efficient social inclusion for all, are priorities for our Government.

With the launch of our national development plan for the period 2018-2021, which seeks to consolidate our recent democratic gains as well as revive and transform our economy for solid growth, job creation and peace consolidation, we have managed to stabilize the economy and institute fiscal discipline through better management of our unsustainable debt. Through a mix of prudent budgetary and macroeconomic policies, we have managed to register a 6.6 per cent rate of economic growth. Our tourism sector, a major foreign-exchange earner, has grown over 21 per cent in the past two years.

Those achievements have also had a positive impact on reducing the phenomenon of irregular migration in our youth. The Government has also come up with targeted interventions for the empowerment of young people in our country. Skills development, entrepreneurial support and other opportunities are now being made available to them. For the Gambia, the ongoing global debate and implementation of the

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development cannot leave young people behind because they constitute the majority of our society.

We therefore ask for international support and partnerships to enable us to create more opportunities through education, skills development and technology, and knowledge transfer, as these have the potential to boost the contribution of our young people towards addressing poverty, social and economic inequalities and the overall attainment of the SDGs. The international community's commitment to working with each other to establish genuine partnerships with a view to sharing and learning from each other's experiences and technical know-how will go a long way in empowering young people and increasing their positive contributions.

As a society in transition, we hope to consolidate our democratic gains by using our national policies and action plans to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2020, we are planning to undergo a voluntary national review at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

One of the major challenges that we must continue to address, even as we strive to bring macroeconomic stability to our economy, is our high debt burden. Therefore, as we concurrently seek the attainment of the SDGs in keeping with our national development priorities, the continued support of our development partners, private sector participation and technical cooperation to help address the capacity and financial gaps will remain critical. We appreciate the ongoing support of the United Nations and its readiness to continue to play a catalytic role in that process as a facilitator of development processes and convener of development actors.

As part of the reforms to address the wrongs of the past, the Government also set up a commission of enquiry into the financial activities of the former President and his close associates. The commission has concluded its work and the Cabinet has reviewed its findings and issued a white paper that included robust recommendations.

As a result of the illegal activities and illicit financial dealings of the former President and his associates, the Gambia has lost more than \$350 million in funds that could have permanently transformed the country's development trajectory. Other estimates were higher. As a poor developing country, we appeal to the

international community to come to our aid in tracking and returning some of that wealth. We ask for the international community's solidarity and cooperation in the recovery of our looted wealth.

The success that we have made would not have been possible without the support of friends and all our bilateral partners, such as the European Union and multilateral organizations, in particular the United Nations; the African Union; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the African Development Bank; the Islamic Development Bank; the World Bank; and the International Monetary Fund. Our partnership with the Peacebuilding Commission remains very critical to the success of our transition process. We are truly grateful for their strong commitment and unwavering support. We continue to face challenges, but with steadfast support of Members the Gambia will emerge as a success story at the end of its transition. Our concerns as a developing country are not very different from those of our neighbours in West Africa and the Sahel.

Across our region, we are facing increasing threats from the rise of terrorism, violent extremism, the proliferation of illicit weapons and drug trafficking, including human trafficking. Deadly terrorist attacks have become more organized, sophisticated and frequent in an increasing number of countries in the subregion. We are grateful to the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and to ECOWAS for constantly championing the problems of the region and we underscore the urgent need to successfully implement the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

The Strategy needs to simultaneously address the security and development challenges of the region with a renewed sense of commitment. More international and regional cooperation and solidarity are needed to tackle the pervasive insecurity and underdevelopment in the Sahel. Without peace, the Sahel and West Africa will find it difficult to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

As we march towards realizing those blueprints of the United Nations and the African Union, respectively, the Gambia will host seven West African countries for a high-level subregional exchange forum, entitled "Localizing the 2030 Agenda: building on what works", to be held from 27 to 29 October. In that regard, the

Gambia is grateful for the partnership that it has established with the United Nations Human Security Unit and the International Peace Institute in an effort to continue sustaining peace and development in the subregion.

My delegation welcomes the Secretary-General's reform proposals on restructuring the peace and security pillar and in the areas of development cooperation, peacebuilding and peacekeeping. We look forward to their successful implementation in line with the Member State-driven processes that were launched to complement them. We also want to see increased efficiency and effectiveness of cooperation in the Sahel, in which the United Nations and other international actors will give priority not only to conflict prevention and sustaining peace but also to regional and subregional cooperation.

The United Nations must provide effective support for the Peacebuilding Commission and overcome fragmentation in its responses by aligning the peace and security needs of the Sahel with the development imperatives of the region. With regard to the Sahel, we must draw inspiration from the wise words of the late Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General, who said that,

“[W]e will not enjoy development without security, or security without development... [and] we will not enjoy either without... respect for human rights”.

The Gambia continues to contribute to peacekeeping and peace initiatives across Africa and beyond. Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020 — an African Union initiative — remains a lofty goal that we must continue to pursue resolutely at this late hour. A peaceful Africa is possible and we must do more to encourage dialogue in Libya with a view to finding a lasting political solution to the conflict there. The parties must lay down their arms, sit down and negotiate in good faith.

We also call on the factions in the Central African Republic to give peace a chance. The United Nations must do more to find lasting peace for the long-suffering people of the Central African Republic and other conflict-affected areas on the continent. My delegation fully supports the political processes currently evolving in the Sudan and South Sudan. We encourage both countries not to rest until they attain the goals of peace, stability and national cohesion.

Across the globe, there are many urgent issues that continue to challenge our collective conscience

and humanity. Over the past few years, we have witnessed a rise in racism, xenophobia, intolerance and anti-migrant sentiments, largely provoked by extremist groups, bigoted politicians and hatemongers, with deadly consequences. Collectively, we must strongly condemn and reject such barbaric attacks, hate speech and divisive rhetoric against foreigners. The world cannot remain silent. Migrants deserve protection and support. More needs to be done at the multilateral level to address those threats. It is our hope that more will be done to implement the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Extreme weather events, increasing desertification, deforestation, rising sea levels and the irreparable loss of biological diversity should all serve as a wake-up call that climate change is real and already upon us. Will we continue our empty rhetoric or continue to look the other way and do nothing? Will we take stronger or bolder steps to address it, or will we continue to take weak or half-hearted measures that do not take us near the 1.5°C target?

The Climate Action Summit, held on Monday, provided the world with a major opportunity for Member States to demonstrate their true commitment to taking critical action that will make a difference. The Gambia is committed and is already taking action to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We expect all nations — small or big — to demonstrate their commitment by taking genuine climate action. Let us leave New York with a new sense of urgency to tackle climate change.

In addition to the urgent need for climate action, there is the fact that hundreds of millions of people in the world today continue to lack health coverage. At the national and international levels, we must adopt clear policies and provide the necessary resources for universal health coverage. For that reason, the Gambia applauded the timeliness of convening a high-level meeting on universal health coverage. We remain hopeful that the outcome of the meeting will be fully implemented for the benefit of all.

At this juncture, allow me to share my delegation's thoughts on some of the political developments in the international arena.

As a pillar of our foreign policy engagement with the Peoples Republic of China, we recognize only one China in our mutual quest to enhance and nurture friendly relations, based on mutual respect and

sovereign equality. We also believe that the evolution of our relations is built on shared prosperity and a win-win approach.

The embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States belongs to a bygone era. We call on the United States to end the embargo and give friendly relations and good-neighbourliness a chance.

We also reiterate our commitment to a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The international community must galvanize renewed efforts leading to a comprehensive peace process. The conflict has persisted for far too long. Palestinians must be allowed to have their own independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel must also stop all settlement activity in occupied Palestinian territories and respect the human rights of Palestinians. The two sides need to urgently negotiate a political solution to a conflict that continues to affect millions of lives. We are convinced that the situation requires a credible peace initiative, which the United Nations and the international community can spearhead with the support of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in its search for peace in Palestine.

The OIC can play a strategic role in partnering with the United Nations and other partners by serving as a credible bridge for mutual dialogue and understanding in the search for comprehensive peace across the Middle East and the world at large. The unique platform that the Organization enjoys in the Islamic world can foster interreligious dialogue and intercultural understanding among peoples and faiths of the world.

The Government of the Gambia champions the promotion and protection of human rights as one of the central pillars of our domestic and foreign policies concerning the well-being of our own people and people elsewhere in the world.

For those reasons, we continue to be deeply concerned about extreme violations of human rights and the troubling increase in cases of xenophobia and related intolerance in certain parts of the world. We therefore count on the Secretary-General and people in a position of authority to use their good offices to engage world leaders to do more to fight intolerance and extremism. We need to make the world a safer and more tolerant place for all peoples.

The Gambia is ready to lead concerted efforts to take the Rohingya issue to the International Court of Justice

on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and we call on all stakeholders to support that process. As a global community with a conscience, we cannot continue to ignore the plight of the Rohingya. It is for that reason that my delegation takes this opportunity to call on the United Nations, like-minded nations and concerned stakeholders to synchronize our efforts in the search for a just, speedy and lasting solution to the Rohingya crisis.

The legitimacy of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and its organs is built on the foundation that all Member States share in the values of the Organization because we all have the same voice and standing when it comes to decision-making. Many are losing faith in the Security Council and its decisions. We need to urgently embark on the reform of the Council, which is long overdue. Today, African issues form the bulk of the Council's agenda but no African country is a veto-wielding member of that organ. A whole continent could be excluded from decisions affecting it that have been considered normal. Let those countries standing in the way of Security Council reform give way and fully support the Ezulwini Consensus of the Group of African States. The demands are just and legitimate.

With the support of all our friends, the Gambia is on a new and upward trajectory today. The Government's approach continues to be strongly guided by our awareness of the difficult past that our people have overcome. In that regard, we continue to ask for the continuing support and cooperation of Member States as we endeavour to build the more prosperous and highly developed country envisaged in our current development blueprint, the Gambia National Development Plan 2018-2021.

As a country in transition, we strongly believe in the value of multilateralism and institutions of multilateral diplomacy as tools to solve our challenges. As small State members, we optimize our strength and leverage our voice when we work with the international community and friends to resolve the collective problems confronting us as one large family. Global challenges require global efforts for satisfactory and cost-effective solutions. We strongly commend the role of the United Nations in our transition process. We will continue to work with all States members of the General Assembly to address the concerns of small and developing countries.

Once again, on behalf of President Barrow, the Government and the people of the Gambia, I extend my sincere appreciation to all our bilateral and multilateral partners for their continuous support and assistance to the country. I wish all Member States a successful seventy-fourth session.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia for the statement she has just made.

Mrs. Isatou Touray, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Zoran Zaev, President of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Mr. Zoran Zaev, President of the Government of Republic of North Macedonia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Zoran Zaev, President of the Government of Republic of North Macedonia, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Zaev (*spoke in Macedonian; interpretation provided by the delegation*): My country has been a Member of the United Nations since 1993. Yet today I address the General Assembly for the first time as the representative of the Republic of North Macedonia. The Prespa agreement entered into force this year, thereby settling a 27-year difference with Greece. That bilateral difference had serious negative implications, in both regional and multilateral settings, becoming regrettably infamous as a difficult and irresolvable problem.

However, today we can see nothing but benefits from settling the difference. We finally have a complete country profile at the United Nations. The name of our country, the Republic of North Macedonia, is followed by the name of our Macedonian language, while the nationality section reads Macedonian/citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia. We now have exceptionally good relations with Greece. Our bilateral cooperation has advanced. We have therefore contributed to regional stability and to encouraging the development of the Western Balkans.

The Prespa agreement, along with the treaty of friendship with Bulgaria, has accelerated our NATO integration and has helped to eliminate the greatest obstacles towards our European Union accession.

Here I would like to underline our appreciation to the United Nations for the support throughout the settlement process, embodied in the 20-year dedicated and unselfish work and efforts of the Personal Envoy of Secretary-General, Mr. Matthew Nimetz, who worked closely with us to find a solution. We believe that the Prespa agreement is a demonstration of the power of diplomacy and dialogue. It is an instrumental example for the settlement of many other unresolved issues. All problems throughout the world are different and have their specific features, yet dialogue and diplomacy are still the best approaches to their settlement. As leaders of our countries, we owe it to our citizens to work to resolve problems, to maintain peace and to create conditions for development and a better life for all.

(*spoke in English*)

I have the honour to address this important body at a time when it is of great importance to reunite in confronting the present and emerging challenges and to recommit to our common values — peace, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and sustainable development. The world is at a crossroads. We therefore need a stronger United Nations to stand and deliver for all and to leave no one behind. A rules-based international order and effective multilateralism, with the central role of the strong and action-oriented United Nations, are necessary in a world of daily uncertainties. Responsible governance, whether at home or in international organizations, requires new skills, as well as multifaceted and diverse, but also bold, approaches and solutions, established on the strong observance of the principles and norms upon which we agreed.

The world continues to struggle with phenomena that transcend borders, which are clearly beyond our individual control. In August, for the first time in its history, Iceland lost a glacier to climate change. A bronze plaque was mounted on a rock in Iceland to commemorate a once seemingly eternal glacier that had been lost to global warming. That should be a global warning for all of us.

Earlier this week, we discussed the urgency of fully implementing our commitments to mitigating climate change. The Climate Action Summit, organized by the Secretary-General on the theme “A race we can

win: a race we must win”, has provided us with the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, expand our ambitions and recognize the impact of climate change on the security and stability of the world and its devastating consequences for human beings.

It also provided an opportunity to mobilize the energy of different stakeholders in the climate change arena and to recognize that our undertaking is of a global nature. But what we all do at home is crucial to our success. In that regard, the nationally determined contributions are key to accelerated climate action. The Republic of North Macedonia has increased its national contributions to the Paris Agreement and has incorporated them as targets in national laws and policies.

On a related issue, we have also debated and are implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are essential to genuine changes and a sustainable future for all. Achieving the goals of eliminating poverty, as well as reducing inequality and the negative impact of climate change and environmental degradation and all the other important goals and targets, which are all cross-cutting and interlinked, provides vast opportunities for countries and international organizations to act to secure the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The Government of North Macedonia is fully committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda and is working on the integration of the SDGs into its national strategic documents and local plans.

The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/74/1) outlined the state of affairs in the world and United Nations efforts in that context, providing a clear picture of the successes and failures, as well as the primary concerns and the way forward. The Prespa agreement concluded between my country, now known as North Macedonia, and Greece, is one of the bright spots of the recent past that was rightly mentioned by the Secretary-General. Two years ago, I declared before the Assembly (see A/72/PV.17) our determination to find a solution with Greece over the so-called name issue. We signed the agreement in June 2018 and it entered into force on 14 February. Reaching that milestone required good faith and above all vision; it also required diplomacy, resilience and mutual trust.

The agreement aims to overcome a history of distrust and a difficult relationship by establishing the foundations of a new era — one of friendship and future partnership. We decided to abandon the trenches of the past and turn to new bright perspectives and progress through partnership and collaborative solutions. Our success was not guaranteed. We made it happen together with our Greek colleagues. That is a milestone that should serve as a catalyst for the transformative processes in the Balkans. It can also serve as an example for overcoming difficult deadlocks worldwide.

That compromise has opened the gates for my country and people to reach their long-term goals of becoming a member of NATO and the European Union. On the issue of our NATO membership, we expect to become its thirtieth member in the very near future. I remain confident that the substantial progress we have made on reforms at home, as well as the resolution of outstanding issues with our neighbours, are strong arguments in favour of the European Union opening accession negotiations with the Republic of North Macedonia.

My country is an active partner in the international anti-terrorism coalition and will continue to contribute to the multilateral efforts aimed at combating terrorism and all its related ills. We commend the Secretary-General’s work and commitment in that area; he deserves our full support. In that context, the serious situations in Syria, Yemen, Libya and Afghanistan, as well as the complexities of the Middle East and the grave situations in parts of Africa, deserve our full attention and effective diplomacy.

Yet another challenge facing us today is mass migration. We have been on its front lines for years now and have experienced its impacts at first hand. The migration crisis also serves as a warning to us that we cannot operate in a vacuum. Its duration shows that we cannot rely on the snooze button. Through the United Nations and other regional organizations, we should join our efforts, while through strategic vision, cooperation mechanisms and initiatives we should address the underlying causes, filter out the positive aspects of migration flows and turn the crisis into an opportunity. We are going to be an active collaborator in that process, just as we have been in the past.

Misinformation and disinformation, along with other targeted campaigns, continue to challenge and damage global democratic governance and test the

resilience of democracies worldwide. Hybrid threats are a danger for the future of our democracies. We need to pool our resources, streamline our efforts and apply multi-stakeholder approaches to combat those challenges. We should also build on some of the few existing examples of dealing with those challenges. The promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law remains one of the core pillars of United Nations values and action. Notwithstanding the existing robust human rights architecture, the gross human rights violations around the globe, along with the widespread impunity and lack of accountability, remind us that there is much to be done nationally, regionally and globally. North Macedonia continues to support all actions aimed at countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the illegal arms trade and supports all aspects of disarmament efforts.

I also wish the President much success in galvanizing positive energy and debates on a wide array of challenging and divisive issues. He may count on the full support of North Macedonia in his endeavour. The Republic of North Macedonia remains a strong supporter of multilateralism. In today's fragmented world, we will continue to work with all stakeholders. This is our shared world. We call on Member States to strengthen their efforts to maintain international peace and security. The commitments that we make in the General Assembly echo across the globe. However, it is our actions at home that secure the protection of human rights and the well-being of individuals. Let our actions be true to our commitments so that we can create a better world for all.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Zoran Zaev, President of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Israel Katz, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Intelligence of the State of Israel.

Mr. Katz (Israel): I, Israel Katz, son of Holocaust survivors Meir and Malka Katz — may they rest in peace — am proud to stand here today, at the rostrum of the United Nations General Assembly, as the Foreign Minister of the State of Israel. For me, this is a very

moving moment. In 1947, the United Nations recognized the right of the Jewish people to their own State in the land of Israel and, 71 years ago, we established the State of Israel. Since then, we have defended and developed our homeland, and today the State of Israel is strong and advanced, a start-up nation that leads in many fields.

Israel is a real democracy for all its citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. But Israel is, first of all, the nation State of the Jewish people, based on thousands of years of Jewish history and the right of the Jewish people to their own homeland, just as the United Nations decided 72 years ago.

I wish to thank the President of the United States, Donald Trump, for his historic and brave decision to recognize Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people for 3,000 years, as the capital of Israel, and to relocate the American Embassy to Jerusalem. I call on all countries to follow the example of the United States in recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. No one can separate the Jewish people from our historical homeland and no one can separate us from Jerusalem, our eternal capital.

Israel wants peace with all its neighbours. We have signed peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan and are working today to advance our relations with many Arab States in the region. We call on the Palestinian Authority to stop incitement, stop encouraging and financing terrorism and recognize the right of the Jewish people to their own State. We call on the Palestinians to return to direct negotiations without any preconditions.

In Gaza, the terrorist organization Hamas is holding two Israeli citizens, Avraham Mengistu and Hisham Al-Sayed, and the bodies of two Israeli soldiers, Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul. I call on the United Nations to implement the decisions that it took on that issue and not allow any country to provide aid to Gaza until Hamas returns them to their families.

Recently, I heard President Erdoğan attack Israel (see A/74/PV.3), and I want to say to him: “You, who brutally oppress the Turkish people, slaughter the Kurdish minority and support the terrorist organization Hamas, are the last person who can lecture Israel. You are not the Sultan and Turkey is not the Ottoman Empire. Shame on you.”

The main problem threatening stability and security in the Middle East is Iran, which threatens to destroy Israel and works against the regimes of

many countries in the region. Iran uses its proxy terrorist organizations, Hizbullah in Lebanon, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen and the Shi'ite militias in Syria and Iraq, against not only Israel but also other States in the Middle East. We recently saw a serious escalation in which Iranian missiles were launched from Iran against Saudi oil facilities in order to destabilize world oil supplies. That terrorist attack against Saudi Arabia was carried out on the direct orders of Iranian leader Ali Khamenei. Iran is the leading terrorist State and the principal sponsor of terror in the world.

I call on the international community to unite to stop Iran. The world cannot allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons and to develop ballistic missiles and it must stop Iran from supporting terrorist organizations in the region.

The United Nations must declare Hizbullah and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as terrorist organizations. They promote terror in the Middle East, Europe, Latin America and all over the world and the world must stop them.

I call on the international community to support President Trump's maximum pressure policy against Iran. That is the way to stop them. We must stop Iran today in order to prevent war tomorrow. To the Iranian leadership, I say, in their own language: "Do not count your chickens until they hatch." It is not over until it is over.

The reality in the Middle East also presents opportunities for cooperation and advancing the economies of all countries. In recent years, Prime Minister Netanyahu and I developed the Tracks for Regional Peace initiative, which will connect the Arab Gulf States by rail through Jordan to the Israeli ports in Haifa. It will provide them a faster, shorter and safer outlet to the Mediterranean. We are also going to connect the Palestinian Authority to this project, which will boost their economy. I presented the initiative to the Secretary-General at our recent meeting in Abu Dhabi and invited him to take part in the important project. Israel has a clear policy to advance ties and normalization with the Arab Gulf States. We have no conflict with the Gulf States and common interests in the field of security against the Iranian threat as well as in developing many joint civilian initiatives.

Israel has great capabilities in many areas, including high tech, innovation, agriculture and water

technology, which can help the Gulf States, while the Gulf States in turn have many capabilities that can help Israel as well. I hope that such cooperation will lead to the signing of peace agreements between our countries, as we signed them with Egypt and Jordan.

I should like to conclude with the words of the prophet Isaiah, who, thousands of years ago invited all the nations of the world to come to pray in Jerusalem:

"Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." (*The Holy Bible, Isaiah 56:7*)

As we are about to celebrate the Jewish new year, I would like to close with a traditional Jewish blessing to all present here today, to the people of Israel and to the Jewish communities around the world: a happy and sweet new year to all.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Péter Szijjártó, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary.

Mr. Szijjártó (Hungary): Last year, I had the honour to stand before the General Assembly (see A/73/PV.13). At that time, I argued against the then-draft global compact for migration, which was still to be adopted. What has happened since then? Last December, in this very Hall (see A/73/PV.60), the General Assembly endorsed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (resolution 73/195). Since then, increasing numbers of people have been hitting the road, and new migratory flows are being launched, posing additional security challenges to countries of origin, transit and destination. The most recent developments are frightening. It is therefore no wonder that the issue of migration again rules European and global political agendas.

One would expect the United Nations and other international organizations to promote and protect international law, to help those who respect and comply with international law and to take a stand against those who violate it. That is our expectation, especially when it comes to fundamental rights. We can and should raise the question: is migration a fundamental human right? The answer is: no, it is not. But what does the United Nations do? The United Nations promotes migration, which we consider truly disappointing.

Going forward, we could raise another question: If migration is not among the fundamental human rights, then what is? The answer is the following: Everyone in the world has the right to live in peaceful, safe and secure circumstances in his or her home. Does the Global Compact for Migration say anything about these people? Does it protect their rights? The answer is, unfortunately, no — a resounding no. Therefore, instead of protecting the actual fundamental human rights of people, the Global Compact for Migration promotes migration, which is not a fundamental human right but a dangerous phenomenon that increases security risks worldwide. We find that to be unacceptable.

Last year, there was an attempt here in the United Nations to celebrate the Global Compact for Migration as the best document ever concluded in the history of the United Nations. But this attempt failed. The United States, Israel, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland voted against the Compact, with Brazil later joining those States. These six votes against prevented the adoption by unanimity of resolution 73/195, and we made it clear then that the Global Compact was the most dangerous document ever created in the United Nations. The past year has, unfortunately, proved us right.

During the debate, some tricks were played. There were false explanations and references given, statements that it would not be a legally binding document although the words “commit” and “commitment” appear in the text 80 times. Over the past year, many attempts have been made here to push the Global Compact for Migration through, part by part, chapter by chapter. Many documents on our agenda contain references to the Compact, sometimes in a surreptitious way, sometimes in an open way. Is this how the Compact is supposed to be made part of international law? I must tell the Assembly that we reject such attempts and urge all United Nations institutions to stop such attempts: stop referring to the Compact in United Nations documents and stop pushing the Compact through in a surreptitious way. I also want to make it clear that we will in future reject all United Nations declarations, documents and resolutions containing any reference to the Global Compact for Migration in whole or in part.

Let us consider what has happened in Europe in recent years. Due to the irresponsible and harmful migration policy of Brussels, more than 1 million illegal migrants entered the territory of Europe. Many people died in the Mediterranean. Perilous societies have arisen in Western Europe, where a noisy minority

continuously and increasingly puts pressure on the silent majority. Terrorist threats have increased. The more than 30 significant terrorist attacks that have been committed in Europe by persons with a migratory background in recent years are the result of the hypocritical, ideologically motivated policy promulgated by Brussels. This policy puts pressures countries to get rid of national identity and cultural, religious and historic heritage in order to weaken member States and finally create a united States of Europe. But this is something that we reject.

We want the European Union to be strong again, but this can happen only when its member States themselves are strong. We are proud that Hungary is a strong country again. We are proud that we have been able to preserve Hungary as a Hungarian country. We are proud of our history. We are proud to be a 1,019-year-old State, among the oldest in Europe. We are proud to be a nation with a strong Christian heritage. We are proud of Christianity’s role in creating and maintaining our statehood. And we are proud to be true patriots, for whom Hungary comes first and for whom the national interest serves as a compass.

We base our foreign policy strategy on a principle called mutual respect. We respect our partners and their history, heritage and the decisions of their citizens. And we expect the same from our partners: that they respect our sovereignty and our specificities, which are based on our very rich history. And we expect our partners to respect the right of Hungarians to take decisions about their own country and its future.

Hungarians have made very clear decisions, on multiple occasions: that we do not want to receive illegal migrants, that we reject all external pressure in this regard, and that we preserve our right to make our own decisions as to whom to allow to enter the territory of our country and whom we do not allow. It is our sole prerogative to decide with whom we would and would not like to live in our country. As this is the express will of the Hungarian people, it is therefore our national interest. For us, fulfilling our national interest is our number one duty.

Unfortunately, based on recent developments in the European Union — opening ports to illegal migrants and debating yet again obligatory quotas for the resettlement of migrants — we must strengthen our efforts to protect our people and security. If we look at the migration situation in South-Eastern

Europe today, it is comparable to that of 2015. Many countries, international organizations and, of course, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) inspire people in need to go to Europe. These people get the inspiration to pay thousands of dollars to smugglers. These people get the inspiration to board derelict vessels. And they get the inspiration to expect NGOs to come and take them illegally to Europe.

Now, another question can be raised, I suppose, and with very good reason: who benefits from this? The answer is obvious: smugglers and organized criminal groups definitely benefit from all of this because they earn millions; and terrorist organizations benefit, too, because massive uncontrolled flows of migrants give terrorist organizations the chance to send their fighters all over the world.

The second part of this question is, who loses under such policies? Without a doubt, countries of origin lose, because if people are going far away from countries of origin, they will never return. The question then becomes, who will reconstruct and rebuild those countries? Transit also countries lose. If we look at the Western Balkans, we see migrants occupying public areas. They behave aggressively. In some schools, teachers were not able to begin teaching their classes in September. This is very similar to what we experienced first-hand in Hungary back in 2015, when 400,000 illegal migrants marched through the heart of the country, behaving in a very aggressive way, attacking our police, occupying public areas and blocking traffic on railway lines and highways. The countries of destination lose as well. And the people themselves lose because they put their lives at risk. If we look once again at how many people have died in the Mediterranean because of this very irresponsible policy being interpreted as an invitation.

Everybody therefore loses. Everybody takes serious risks — except for the smugglers and terrorists organizations. I believe the United Nations should not do this. The United Nations should not encourage migratory waves; rather it should play a leading role in resolving conflicts, in helping countries to develop, in helping African countries to build capacity, because Africa can be the continent of the future, but only if we build capacities to keep people at home under appropriate circumstances. The United Nations should help those who have fled to return home as soon as possible. We should carry out reconstruction projects. We should guarantee the physical and legal security of

those who had to flee and would like to return to their homes. We should help countries to protect themselves from negative shocks and security risks.

The United Nations should also help countries to ensure the security and safety of their own citizens. That is exactly what Hungary has been doing. We respect our obligations as a State to protect our citizens and guarantee them a safe and secure life, which is why we strictly and steadfastly protect our borders, allowing no illegal trespassing. The only way to come to Europe should be the legal way. The only way to come to Hungary is the legal way. We reject the approach that we should allow people to violate our borders. Why should we let people violate our borders? What humanitarian or legal reason would impel us to allow anybody to violate a border between two safe and peaceful countries?

Indeed, border protection is a national security issue, and the United Nations should not act against the national security interests of any Member State. Unfortunately, the United Nations promotes the idea of allowing people to violate borders between peaceful countries. We expect the United Nations to consider the violation of a border as a serious criminal offence that should be prevented and punished instead of promoted and encouraged. We expect the United Nations to stop portraying NGOs as legitimate representatives of nations because they are not. Elected politicians represent their nations; Governments, not NGOs, are authorized by their peoples to act. I myself have never seen any NGO run in an election. In fact, it is to Governments and elected officials that people entrust authority. That is why Governments and elected politicians have the right to speak on behalf of nations and on behalf of peoples.

We read the Global Compact for Migration to provide that all countries must in future become either a country of origin, a country of transit or a country of destination. We reject this notion. We believe there is a fourth category: there are countries, such as Hungary, that do not wish to be a country of origin, transit or destination. And we have the right to so decide.

We urge the United Nations to stop portraying migration as the best development ever for humankind. We do not look at migration as the best instrument for addressing demographic and labour-market challenges. Let us leave it up to Member States to make sovereign decisions in this domain.

We in Hungary support our families and continuously modernize education instead of encouraging migration. And this approach works. The proof is that we are now number one in the European Union in terms of gross domestic product growth and we have reached full employment. We must also dispel another suggestion going around here, stating that multicultural societies are by definition better than homogeneous societies. We Hungarians do not feel less valuable just because we are not a multicultural society. We should leave it up to sovereign nations to decide how they want to live their lives.

Let us provide help where it is needed and avoid causing problems where there are none. This is our principle. We must help people stay in their home countries with human dignity and help those having fled to return to their homes as soon as possible because this is what international law prescribes.

We Hungarians have spent \$40 million to help Christian communities in the Middle East — in Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. We have rebuilt thousands of demolished houses and dozens of razed churches. We are covering the medical costs in the largest Christian hospitals in Syria. We have been rebuilding schools. Through these efforts, we have helped more than 50,000 people to be able to remain in their home country or to return as soon as possible. Through this programme of helping Christian communities, we wish to draw the attention of the international community to the fact that Christianity is the most persecuted religion the world over.

In order to help those countries currently unable to retain their populations, this year, we have increased our financial support to the least developed countries sevenfold, to \$29 million, and, this year, we have increased our financial support to Africa fivefold, to \$25 million dollars. I believe it is crucial for young people to be involved in these efforts. Capacity-building is of the utmost importance, which is why we are providing 4,870 scholarships to students from least developed countries in Asia, Africa and South America to gain the competitive knowledge and skills that contribute to strengthening their own countries when they return home. We do this because our top priority must be to help all people to enjoy a safe and secure life in their home countries. This is what international law requires and what responsible behaviour dictates.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Alexander Schallenberg, Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria.

Mr. Schallenberg (Austria): Never in the history of the world has humankind been more interconnected. Never in its history has humankind been better informed about events happening on the other side of the planet. And never have we been more acutely aware that we all face the same challenges — such challenges as climate change, migration, transnational crime and terrorism. They are global in nature and, therefore, by definition, require global responses. But instead of reproducing the heyday of international cooperation, as we should, multilateral diplomacy has entered a period of crisis.

There are many examples of that development. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change is no longer a global arrangement by all. Great Powers have withdrawn from longstanding disarmament treaties. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action hangs by a thread, which has led to a spiral of toughening positions. The United Nations and other multilateral organizations are often sidelined from solving conflicts, and, what is more, the Security Council often fails to achieve consensus on how to bring peace to the world's worst crisis areas. I am deeply concerned by these developments.

Like many other small and medium-sized countries, Austria depends on negotiated solutions for addressing global problems. If the choice is between the rule of law and the law of the jungle, for Austria the answer is very clear: there needs to be a rules-based international order, where good governance, open markets and the notion of *pacta sunt servanda* prevail.

Everyone in this Hall is aware that multilateralism is hard work, often frustrating and has no easy wins or quick fixes, and that the need to compromise can be hard to sell to a domestic audience. But there is simply no alternative to international cooperation. Neither unilateralism nor multilateralism *à la carte* will solve any of the complex challenges we face.

The European Union is built on cooperation and compromise, and I believe that we Europeans are therefore highly credible in reaffirming our commitment to rules-based multilateralism. Against this backdrop, I should like to address several global challenges that, in my view, urgently demand multilateral solutions.

The first is climate change. The year 2018 has been the hottest on record in Austria. Our glaciers are melting away. Our Alpine regions are severely suffering. Climate change is truly a global challenge, which requires urgent global action.

As a member of the High Ambition Coalition, we are fully committed to the Paris Climate Agreement and we support the Secretary-General's call for the swift implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 13 at this week's Climate Action Summit. In the coming years, Europe will work hard towards becoming the world's first climate-neutral continent, which means net-zero greenhouse-gas emissions by 2050. The Green New Deal in Europe, which the incoming European Commission has put forward, is very ambitious, and it sends a very strong signal to the world. However, such ambition should not be limited to Europe. At the High-level Political Forum, all States Members of the United Nations reaffirmed their commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Austria will present its first voluntary national review at next year's High-level Political Forum. Our focus will be on climate, women and youth.

For almost a decade, armed conflict has been raging in Syria and Iraq, with hundreds of thousands of victims and displaced persons. The so-called Islamic State has been defeated on the ground, but we owe it to the victims of its crimes to ensure that justice is delivered. Austria therefore continues to strongly support the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. In addition, we believe that a special criminal tribunal should be established in the region to ensure accountability for the most serious crimes. This approach should go hand in hand with capacity-building for national justice to ensure due process.

Today, most conflicts are fought in cities and densely populated areas. In this urban warfare, international humanitarian law is often violated, with devastating consequences. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 91 per cent of the casualties, on average, are civilians. This is simply unacceptable. Clearly, we need to strengthen the protection of civilians. In order to emphasize the importance and urgency of this issue, Austria is bringing together in Vienna a broad alliance of partners next week, on 1 and 2 October 2019, for the first worldwide international conference on this topic. I cordially invite all Member States to attend.

The protection and promotion of human rights is and remains a clear priority for Austria, and we are honoured to be serving on the Human Rights Council for the next three years. International humanitarian law and the universality of human rights are probably the greatest achievements of the modern global community. We must clearly stand up against any attempts to undermine them. Human rights are simply not negotiable. The international community has a duty to demand accountability when human rights are violated. We therefore welcome the independent investigations in Syria, Yemen and Myanmar.

As geopolitical tensions have grown, so has the risk of military confrontation. After the disappointing end of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, we must avoid the deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe. We urge the United States and Russia to refrain from taking any steps in this direction and call for an extension of the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

As long as nuclear weapons exist, the risk of their use — on purpose or by accident — remains real. These weapons are inhumane and a danger to our security. The current narrative that nuclear weapons are somehow necessary for security is not only wrong: it is outright dangerous. The case for the total elimination of nuclear weapons is very clear. This is a moral imperative, but, more than that, what is at stake is the survival of humankind. We are therefore encouraged that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which Austria helped initiate, is now well on its way to entering into force. I call on all States to sign and ratify the Treaty and contribute to a world free of nuclear weapons. We also support initiatives to ban weapons that are fully autonomous. We cannot allow machines to decide issues of human life and death.

At the outset, I shared with the Assembly my concern about the state of multilateralism. But at the same time, here in this Hall, I also feel hope. Why is that so? I feel this way because, once again, the United Nations high-level week has brought us all together: those that stress sovereignty and those who call for multilateralism, those who underline national priorities and those who seek international solutions, the patriots and the globalists — all together, here, at the United Nations, to talk, discuss and listen to each other. To me, this is multilateralism.

Next year, the United Nations will turn 75. That is a very respectable age and a reason to celebrate one of

the greatest institutions ever created. However, we all know that the United Nations needs to be modernized. Austria therefore strongly supports the Secretary-General's reform agenda.

The global challenges we are all facing together require a strong United Nations. It is in all our interests. In May this year, in Vienna, we celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the Vienna International Centre, a hub for addressing security issues, including nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, energy, sustainable development, the peaceful use of outer space and the fight against corruption, drugs and crime. I can assure members of the General Assembly that Austria is and will remain a proud and committed United Nations host country.

All of us here in this Hall share the same responsibility for the effectiveness of the United Nations and the international order that we have built together over the past decades. As the Secretary-General put it, in a time of multiple complex challenges, multilateralism is the world's best hope. Austria stands ready to assume its responsibilities as a member of the Human Rights Council, as host of the United Nations in Vienna, as a committed troop contributor to peacekeeping and as a candidate for membership of the Security Council in 2027-2028.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim bin Abdulaziz Al-Assaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Assaf (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I have the pleasure to convey to His Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande my congratulations for his elections as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session; I also thank Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés for her efforts as President of the Assembly at the seventy-third session. In addition, I commend Secretary-General António Guterres for his efforts.

I had hoped to talk today about the efforts made by my country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a founding member of the United Nations, aimed at fulfilling the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, namely, to preserve peace and security for the peoples of the world, achieve prosperity, growth and stability in our region, and pursue noteworthy development and humanitarian action worldwide. I had also hoped to review such economic and social challenges facing our

world as poverty, climate change, the spread of diseases and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, while highlighting the Kingdom's positions, perspectives and actions in those areas. I had hoped as well to talk about my country's ongoing economic development and reforms in various fields, its vision that is seeking to take us back to our true Islamic faith, which rejects extremism in all its forms, and its vision of achieving an advanced and innovative society in all areas, connected and engaged with the world around it and beyond.

However, what I would like to talk about in the General Assembly today is the dangerous and aggressive act that took place on 14 September, which violates the purposes and principles set forth in the United Nations Charter and which threatens the security, stability and prosperity of our region and the world. This dangerous and aggressive act requires that each of us takes a historic stance. This is the subject of my address today.

The reprehensible attacks by 25 cruise missiles and drones against the oil facilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia cut oil production by nearly half, an amount equivalent to 5.7 million barrels per day. These attacks constitute a flagrant violation of international laws and customs, an affront to international peace and security and a significant threat to global oil supplies. Let me repeat that: they constitute a flagrant violation of international laws and customs, an affront to international peace and security and a significant threat to global oil supplies.

We know very well who stood behind that act of aggression, and have invited international experts from the United Nations, and other entities, to investigate and confirm this knowledge. Those who authored the bombings are also responsible for the assaults on commercial tankers in the Gulf of Oman in June and July, the attacks on Abha airport in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in July and the Shabwa oilfield in Yemen in August. That same regime hides behind its militias in the most miserable and cowardly manner, holding them responsible for the attacks on Abqaiq and Khurais and, prior to those attacks, on Saudi oil-pumping facilities. The regime in question looks on our States and our peoples as a mere context for enacting its destructive agenda.

We have known that regime quite well for some 40 years. Its only strength is masterminding explosions, destruction and assassinations, not only in our region

but throughout the world. Ever since its inception, this regime has carried out terrorist acts in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, various European countries and beyond. It assassinated a number of Saudi diplomats in Thailand in 1989 and 1990, and was responsible for the assassination of a Saudi diplomat in Karachi in 2011. May they all rest in peace. In addition, in that same year, the regime tried to assassinate our Ambassador to the United States. It was this regime that assassinated the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafiq Hariri, in the heart of Beirut in 2005. Sadly, the regime in question has continued to operate in this manner to this day. In recent years, we have seen it try to carry out terrorist attacks in Denmark and France, and not a day goes by without violent acts being committed under its auspices in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East region.

The most recent attacks have exposed the nature of the Iranian regime to the entire world. We are dealing with a rogue terrorist regime that is threatening international peace and security, as well as energy supplies and the world economy. The recent attacks are a real test of the international community's will.

The United Nations and the international community as a whole have a historic moral responsibility to take a firm and unified position with regard to Iran. They should apply utmost pressure and use every tool at their disposal to end the aggressive terrorist behaviour of the Iranian regime. Half-measures and partial or interim agreements will not suffice; efforts must be made to change the nature and behaviour of the rogue Iranian regime. Otherwise, peace and security in our region and across the globe, as well as the stability of the world's economy and energy security, will be left to an unknown fate.

Over the past century, we have seen how policies of appeasement can lead to death and destruction all over the world. In the case of Iran, appeasement policies have led to partial agreements with the regime, and in the past four years have merely invited it to continue or expand its aggressive terrorist activities. The Iranian regime must be confronted by an international community with a unified and resolute stance that can apply maximum pressure until Iran abandons terrorism altogether. We must all confront the Iranian regime realistically and with an awareness of its well-known nature, rather than on the basis of illusions or assumptions that have repeatedly been proved wrong. The truth is that the bloodthirsty Iranian regime poses

a threat not just to the peoples of the region but to the security of the whole world. It is a mistake to believe that reaching partial agreements with a view to lifting sanctions, or returning to previous failed agreements, will put the Iranian regime on a path to moderating its actions and ridding the world of its evil.

Anyone who needs proof of the failure of the nuclear deal should look to the crimes committed by the Iranian regime in Syria, which have claimed more than half a million Syrian lives. The Iranian regime has participated in their murder, either directly or through its agents and its support for militias such as the terrorist organization Hizbullah. Anyone who needs further proof should take a look at the wreckage of the more than 250 ballistic missiles that have been fired at citizens of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The United Nations has recognized that those missiles were provided by the Iranian regime to the militias it sponsors in Yemen, in blatant violation of Security Council resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015). Anyone who needs further proof should look at the party that is responsible for obstructing a peaceful settlement of the situation in Yemen, violating international resolutions, targeting civilians, threatening maritime navigation in vital waterways and preventing humanitarian access. The rogue Iranian regime has used the revenues it has obtained from the implementation of the nuclear deal to finance its aggressive terrorist activities. It is therefore incumbent on the international community to cut off the regime's sources of financing, which will be the best and most peaceful way to compel it to renounce its militias, stop developing ballistic missiles and end its destabilizing activities in the region and around the world.

It is now up to us to assume this historic responsibility. The credibility of the United Nations and the entire world is at stake. The Iranian regime must be forced to choose between two options — become a normal State that respects international laws and norms or face a united international front of pressure and deterrence. My country — the land of the two Holy Mosques and the place to which Muslims turn to pray — has never been a proponent of war, but it will not hesitate to defend its holy sites and sovereignty if it has to.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Makei, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Makei (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): “Never forget” is a summons that has remained one of the most important watchwords of the international community since 1945. There is no question that the memory of the tens of millions of victims of the Second World War, the atrocities committed by the Nazis and their criminal policies of genocide enabled us to agree on a new world order that is still helping us to avoid another world war whose consequences would be disastrous for the entire planet. And yet today, unfortunately, we are closer than ever to crossing that dangerous line.

There can be no doubt that issues related to peace and security, sustainable development and climate change are some of the most pressing currently on humankind’s agenda and it is they that are being discussed most actively in international forums. We are actively seeking joint solutions to the many challenges facing the international community, such as terrorism, transnational crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking and illegal migration. At the same time, numerous new and emerging risks await the development of adequate and above all timely responses. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the capacities of individual or even groups of States are no longer sufficient to resolve these problems and save the world from disasters, whether military, economic or climatic.

Belarus is a State that believes that all of those global challenges require effective joint solutions on a similarly global scale. The key elements in that approach are ensuring that all States Members of the United Nations, without exception, participate in implementing the measures that we agree to, that all the available political, economic and intellectual resources are mobilized and that given its universal composition and mandate, the United Nations fulfils its role as a leader in uniting and coordinating international efforts. Unfortunately, we are dealing increasingly with the fact that the multilateral mechanisms of the United Nations are either not working or have stalled, becoming hostage to biased approaches, mutual recriminations or excessive ambitions. Cases involving the implementation of measures that undermine the norms and principles of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, are increasing and doing serious damage to the multilateral approach.

Dozens of local conflicts are tearing the world apart, and many of them have the potential to ignite a new world war. We believe that both ongoing and frozen conflicts should be resolved through dialogue based

solely on the fundamental principles of international law, including respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and for refraining from the use or threat of use of force. We now find ourselves in a situation of dangerous and conflicting realities. It is quite clear that we must find answers to our common challenges before those realities have catastrophic consequences. I think many will agree that this is not the way that the international community would like to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations next year. The anniversary summit should give us a powerful incentive to find those answers and above all should help to enhance the role of the United Nations in strengthening peace and security, restoring dialogue and trust and, most importantly, preventing the threat of conflict on a global scale. Belarus urges the world leaders who will gather in this Hall next year to dedicate the meeting to those issues. If the anniversary summit becomes just another protocol event, all of us — the Organization and all its members — will lose. The dreadful spectre of a third world war could become a reality.

In the past few years, Belarus has been taking concrete steps by actively insisting on the importance of avoiding confrontation and resuming a broad dialogue on key issues of international security. That dialogue would enable all of us, and especially the great Powers, to agree on a path for maintaining peace and finding a concerted response to the ever-growing number of global challenges. The events of recent months have affirmed the rightness of the approach of States such as Belarus that have consistently supported launching a new negotiation process similar to the Helsinki process of the mid-1970s, aimed at stabilizing international relations, strengthening international dialogue and improving predictability.

In August, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, one of the pillars of the modern disarmament architecture and a symbol of the end of the Cold War, ceased to function, creating a real danger that the types of missiles it covered, with a flying time of a few minutes, could be deployed in various regions of the world, including Europe. That will inevitably lead to a further increase in tensions and a new spiral of political and military confrontation, making the risk of a nuclear apocalypse more likely. That is why we support immediate concerted action to preserve the Treaty’s achievements in our shared home, the European continent. At the High-level Conference of Heads of

Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States, held on 3 September in Minsk with the theme “Countering terrorism through innovative approaches and the use of new and emerging technologies”, President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus declared that Belarus, as a full-fledged signatory to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, has not withdrawn from it and does not intend to produce or deploy such missiles unless its security threatened.

President Lukashenko has called for an initiative to develop a declaration on the part of responsible countries on the non-deployment of intermediate- and short-range missiles in Europe. We propose starting work on preparing a draft declaration as soon as possible and call on all States on both sides of the Atlantic that care about the fate of humankind to support us in that initiative. The United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe could be suitable platforms for that work. In our view, a key element of the declaration would be clear and firm commitments on the part of States to refraining from producing or deploying intermediate- and short-range missiles on their territory. We realize that implementing this initiative will require political will and a difficult negotiation process. But as a Latin saying has it, *viam supervadet vadens* — that is, to get to the end of the road, one has to keep walking — because, after all, there was a time when treaties banning chemical and biological weapons or reducing nuclear and conventional arsenals also seemed an impossible dream.

Every year we hear, including from this rostrum, more and more about the growing role of technology in the modern world. On the one hand, new technologies are emerging that open up unprecedented opportunities for progress in many areas of human life. On the other, there is the risk that technologies and resources could be used for criminal purposes. The recent drone attacks on infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, which only further destabilize the situation in the Middle East and in the Gulf region in particular, are a clear example of that. Belarus firmly condemns such acts, regardless of their perpetrators. The great Albert Einstein once said, very appositely, that “technological progress is ... like an axe in the hands of a pathological criminal.”

The fact is, we are at the beginning of a long-term global process that people are already calling a technological arms race. The danger is that forces of evil are just as likely to exploit that race as forces of good, and it is our job to do everything possible to ensure that

evil has no chance whatever to dominate. In the current context of tensions and growing competition between countries, cyberspace is increasingly becoming an arena of confrontation. We are constantly hearing about destructive hacker attacks. That all speaks to the scale of the threats in that area, and also to how crucial it is that we expand inter-State digital cooperation and improve mutual trust in the information arena.

Speaking in Minsk at the Conference of Counter-Terrorism Agencies, President Lukashenko proposed the establishment of a linked digital neighbourhood based on concluding bilateral and multilateral agreements for ensuring international information security. The key elements in the agreements could be the notions of digital sovereignty and neutrality, as well as the non-interference of countries in one another’s information resources. Digital sovereignty should guarantee a State’s ability to control its information space, prevent and block cyberattacks, and reliably protect its critical digital infrastructure. Digital neutrality would imply that countries would undertake no actions in cyberspace that would be detrimental to other States’ security. Such agreements could ultimately lay the groundwork for developing international rules for responsible conduct in cyberspace. Through these agreements, as President Lukashenko put it, waves of digital security could be launched, strengthening ties between countries and enhancing the effectiveness of concerted action against terrorist threats in cyberspace. Belarus is ready to develop cooperation and strengthen ties in the area of international information security with every country in the world, and especially its neighbours.

The global economy has also been affected by the turbulence in today’s world, becoming increasingly feverish as the scope of digital trade and financial flows grows ever greater. Economic cooperation at the regional level is growing and people’s welfare is improving in many parts of the world. Significant regional integration initiatives are being implemented. There are also many problems in this area, however. Political differences between countries are taking the form of protectionism and sanctions. Speculation in financial markets continues. Artificial barriers have been created to prevent a number of countries from joining the World Trade Organization. The world’s leading economies are engaged in a full-scale trade war, which only makes it harder to solve problems and increases the risk of real war. The language of unilateral

coercive measures, which has no place in the United Nations, remains a reality in relations with a number of countries, including freedom-loving Cuba.

All of that leads to another acute problem, which is the inequitable nature of economic globalization. In the opinion of many, it has not turned out to be the rising tide that lifts all boats. What actually happens is that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The potential for cooperation between regional economic blocs is not being fulfilled. That issue deserves special attention. Some analysts predict that the future global order will be a world built around regions rather than major Powers. Indeed, life has shown us that wherever regional integration is successful, the chances of political fragmentation diminish.

We firmly believe that regional processes must cooperate effectively with one another. Belarus is an actively participant in various regional integration blocs. Moreover, for a number of years we have consistently worked to establish partnerships and cooperation among integrating alliances. In Minsk in 2020, as President of the Eurasian Economic Union, Belarus plans to host its first forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Commission. That will not only help the countries that our partners in the Eurasian bloc to synchronize watches and share their experiences on issues related to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, it will also enable the Eurasian Economic Union region to speak with its own unique voice in the global debates on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, raise common issues and help to highlight our States' diversity. As a matter of principle, Belarus believes that regional economic organizations must be actively involved as effectively as possible in efforts to implement the SDGs, in order to help coordinate the economic policies of regional blocs' member States. That can create a multiplier effect for national economies, which are the backbone of the entire system of regional and global sustainability. Progress in that direction, along with Belarus's proposal for a comprehensive dialogue on security, could be an important contribution to overcoming our geopolitical uncertainty.

Mr. Inguanez (Malta), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I would like to focus on one more important topic. Against the backdrop of the world's ever-increasing population and the resulting growth in the exploitation

of the Earth's limited resources, we can see that the problem of climate change is becoming more acute. We are probably very close to a point of no return if we do not take decisive action. The efforts of the international community to reduce emissions are so far clearly lagging behind the devastating processes of climate change. The Climate Action Summit, which was recently held at the United Nations Headquarters, offers hope for consolidating the international community's efforts and implementing meaningful initiatives to reduce emissions. As a responsible participant in the collective efforts to combat climate change, Belarus intends to make an unconditional commitment to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions by a minimum of 35 per cent of its 1990 levels by 2030 and will exclusively use its own resources to do so. Launching an incentivizing mechanism for the transfer of advanced knowledge and technologies to developing countries, along with climate investments, would be a powerful driver for the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Today, on the eve of its anniversary, the United Nations and the whole world are facing their next important frontier. We will be able to cross that symbolic boundary if we can succeed in finding the right answers to our existing and emerging challenges on the politics, economy and technology fronts. To that end, it is more crucial than ever that we restore confidence in relations between States at the global and regional levels. We must learn once again how to be good neighbours and solve problems together in our home, our planet. Belarus is ready to continue to contribute in that regard, in every format and on various platforms, including in Minsk. The important thing is that we work to make our world a calmer, fairer and cleaner place and to give our peoples hope for peace and prosperity.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Jeppe Kofod, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

Mr. Kofod (Denmark): Denmark is an old nation, full of new ideas. We may not be a big country, but we have big ambitions. In today's world I believe we need both new ideas and big ambitions if we are to solve the issues facing us, including climate change, delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring fair globalization.

We live in a world smaller than ever before, a world where our futures are bound together as at no other time in human history, an unpredictable world where the

growing interdependency of nations and peoples has made international cooperation more necessary than ever before. And yet today's headlines are overflowing with ideas of division, exit, unilateralism and self-interest. While it is paradoxical that such ideas are thriving precisely when they are least needed, it would be a critical mistake to dismiss them as irrational or irrelevant. We, the decision-makers of the world, must understand the realities and perceptions that have caused such ideas to grow.

The rules-based international order has fostered globalization, giving many of us a world of opportunities and social progress and a belief that tomorrow will be better than today. Enormous wealth has been created, but it is not fairly shared. Not all have shared in the benefits of globalization or been shielded from its negative sides. When some of the wealthiest companies and individuals in the world break their societal contract, when they do not pay their fair share of taxes, how can we in fairness ask those of lesser means to do so? We must ensure that everyone carries the burden, especially those with the broadest shoulders. We must fight for fair and sustainable globalization. That requires a global approach. Denmark believes in multilateralism and in the inherent value of universally agreed rights, standards and obligations. The SDGs and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change serve as our common point of departure. They prove that we can still deliver ambitions and plans as a global community. But now multilateralism must deliver more than plans and ambitions. We must deliver action.

The SDGs are not only a vision of the world we want. They are also a blueprint for how we get there. It remains the primary responsibility of countries to deliver the SDGs at home, but no one should face the responsibility alone or find that a sincere request for help goes unanswered. We clearly live in a world where solidarity is needed, and not just words of solidarity. For more than 40 years, Denmark has delivered on its promise made in this Hall (resolution 2626 (XXV)), providing at least 0.7 percent of our wealth in official development assistance. We are proud to maintain that dedication on the road to 2030.

"We the peoples" are the first words of the Charter of the United Nations. Our efforts must similarly start and end with the peoples. That means doing our utmost to solve what the Secretary-General has rightly called the defining issue of our time. Getting the climate under control can no longer be the problem of the next

generation or even the next Government. It is up to us. The time is now, and action is needed. Denmark has set one of the most ambitious climate targets in the world, a 70 per cent reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions by 2030 and climate neutrality with net-zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. Make no mistake, that will not be easy. We have a massive task ahead of us. But Denmark is determined to be a leader in the fight against climate change.

Denmark would like to thank the Secretary-General for hosting the Climate Action Summit. We were proud and honoured to co-lead the energy transition track for the Summit. Together with Ethiopia and Sustainable Energy for All, and joined by a cross-regional coalition, we have focused our energy on energy. The reason is obvious. Energy accounts for roughly 80 per cent of global carbon-dioxide emissions. We need to scale up renewable energy. We need to increase energy efficiency. We need to electrify the industries that today rely on fossil fuels. But let me be clear. Almost 1 billion people are currently living without electricity. The clean-energy transition will be neither socially sustainable nor fair if we leave those people in the dark. We have to fulfil the promise of SDG 7 on delivering affordable and clean energy to all. We must leave no one behind on our path to a carbon-neutral world, at peace with the planet. Nor can we address climate change effectively without protecting the natural environment. Deforestation and forest fires in the Amazon and across the planet are global climate crises and must be addressed as such. Denmark is committed to reducing deforestation and is ready to assist if needed and requested.

While Governments must lead in this journey, we cannot walk alone. Partnerships with all relevant actors are crucial if we want to meet the ambitious goals that we have agreed to so that we can meet a deadline that has been set not by us, but by the planet. In true partnership, Denmark intends to work with the international investment community to mobilize much-needed private capital for green energy by 2020. At the Climate Action Summit, we were proud to announce that Danish pension funds are also taking action, committing the Danish people's hard-earned savings to significant new international green-energy investments. We also announced our intention to double our support to the Green Climate Fund. And our industries are committed too. The Getting to Zero Coalition, which includes the Danish shipping company Maersk and other partners, illustrates how shipping is showing leadership. With

the aim of creating carbon-neutral vessels as early as 2030, the Coalition is bringing together the entire value chain. We must ensure that the ships connecting our world are not a danger to our planet.

But partnerships must not only be built across sectors and across borders. They must also be forged across generations. We must include young people, and we must empower them and hear their voices. We must enable their action so that they can shoulder their part of the responsibility to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And our youth will deliver if they are given access to the quality education we promised them. They will need an education not only to learn but also, as the Secretary-General has said, to learn to learn. Technological advancements, not least in the private sector, have provided extraordinary tools and possibilities. But only together can the public and private sectors lift future generations to levels of education unimaginable today. Not only because it is right, but because we need the innovative and pioneering thinking of future generations to ensure a world that continues to prosper. To quote a young Danish delegate who attended the Youth Climate Summit last Saturday,

“We want you to hear us when we say we want to be part of the solution. We know our climate is threatened, we know what needs to be done. But we also know that none of us can make the needed changes on our own.”

Let us show the hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of young people who have taken to the streets recently to protest for climate action that we are listening. And let us do more than that. Let us act. We owe it to them. It is our common responsibility.

“We the peoples” means a just world where harmful social and economic inequalities are abolished, where decent jobs are available to all and universal human rights prevail without discrimination of any kind. It certainly does not mean “we the men”. Today I am addressing the Assembly as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, but also as a proud father of two wonderful little girls. Since we opened the seventy-fourth session, more than 300,000 girls have been born — ideally into a world of no discrimination, but in reality into a world where actively promoting gender equality and the right of every woman to make decisions about her own body is seen as a battleground.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are fundamental for all women and girls, no matter where

they are born. The fight for the rights of women and girls is an everyday part of Denmark’s policy as a member of the Human Rights Council, in the General Assembly Hall and as an incoming member of the Commission on the Status of Women. Later this year, together with Kenya and the United Nations Population Fund, Denmark will proudly chair a conference in Nairobi to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Cairo Programme of Action. It is high time that we delivered on the promise made 25 years ago and ensured that these rights can become a reality for all, not just a privilege for some.

As I mentioned, Denmark has worked in close partnership with Ethiopia on energy and with Kenya on gender equality, in two examples of the partnerships across regions that we need to ensure sustainable development for all. We must realize the full potential of all continents, including Africa, where a proud history, natural wealth and a young, energetic population form a powerful base for progress. Denmark will support closer partnerships between our continents on multiple issues, including trade, development and stabilization.

All States have a responsibility to prevent conflict and protect people. Hiding behind sovereignty while committing crimes is not acceptable. That is why Denmark supports the Secretary-General’s focus on prevention, early response to conflicts and the inclusion of regional actors. We remain concerned about the serious threat to regional security posed by the recent attacks on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia. Denmark calls for dialogue, restraint and de-escalation.

Denmark has contributed significantly to the Peacebuilding Fund and we will continue to support the training and education of United Nations peacekeepers. More than 50,000 Danish women and men have served in peacekeeping operations since the creation of the United Nations. Even as I speak, my countrymen and -women are hard at work in challenging operations from Mali to the Middle East, serving “we the peoples”.

To deliver on global challenges, we need a strong United Nations that is fit for purpose. Denmark continues to be a steadfast supporter of all three reforms initiated by the Secretary-General. The next year will be about implementation. Across all those reforms, we will focus on the ability to deliver on core challenges. Our embassies will engage in implementation and maintain a close dialogue with the United Nations teams on the ground. We urge the Secretary-General

to ensure a human rights-based approach to all areas of the work of the United Nations. It is more important than ever to promote a culture of human rights within the United Nations. Alarms about serious human rights violations around the world must always be heard across the Secretariat and at its top as well.

Our ability to deliver as “we the peoples” will determine whether people will continue to look to this Organization for answers and solutions. In order to continue to be the place for solving the global issues of our times, the United Nations — all of us, that is — must deliver on climate action, sustainable development, human rights and peace and security. We know the challenges and we know what is needed. Now let us show the necessary will and act together.

Address by Mr. Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta.

Mr. Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Muscat (Malta): We can describe today’s world in many ways — interdependent, aware and diverse. Yet it is also polluted, isolationist and unequal. We have never been so close together and yet so far apart. We are living in an era when individuals are at the centre of the decision-making process and yet the decisions that are being taken are not necessarily people-centred. Contradictory situations and outcomes are the order of the day.

We cannot just accept all of that as inevitable. We are fortunate enough to be living in an age when we are not only aware of the changes that are happening around us, we are also part of them. We are duty-bound to ensure that these ongoing changes and transformations leave no one behind. Transformations should be used to benefit our peoples, not to create divisions between the haves and the have-nots or those on the outside and those on the inside. Economic prosperity does not mean social injustice, and being a patriot does not equate to isolating a nation. The future should be equal. It is our responsibility to show the value

of all peoples, irrespective of their age, race, sexual orientation, gender, creed and ability. Diversity is an enriching factor for any society. Firm in this belief, our country has embarked on a journey of conviction to fight social marginalization and address the needs and rights of those who for decades were considered to be the daughters and sons of a lesser God.

From marriage equality to gender-neutral markers, the advancements made by Malta in the field of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) community are described by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as the global gold standard. It is a privilege and a responsibility to be seen as a world leader on such an important matter. With a rating of 94 per cent on the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association Rainbow Map, Malta is now consistently the leading European country in protecting people’s rights in the areas of equality and non-discrimination, hate crime and hate speech, legal gender recognition and bodily integrity, civil-society space and asylum. All of that was achieved in just a few years, thanks to a strong bond between Government and civil society. Our experience has taught us that empowering citizens and ensuring that they have a voice in addressing and resolving issues that concern them and affect their lives is an important part of our success as a country. And yet in spite of our success, there is still a long way to go.

Our ambition is clear. We want not only to provide the necessary legal platform but to contest social norms that abet stigma and discrimination. Legislation alone does not guarantee social change. We are working fast and actively on this aspect and our efforts are starting to bear fruit. The latest European Commission Eurobarometer survey on LGBTQI equality ranked Malta first in acceptance of gender-identity recognition. It also showed positive results in social acceptance of LGBTQI people and the need for inclusive educational curricula in schools. On the other hand, we note that we need to do a lot more to ensure that certain issues, such as family acceptance, have a more holistic approach.

Autonomy and empowerment are values that our legislation and practice seek to mainstream, while ensuring appropriate support for persons who could find themselves in more vulnerable situations. That is why we have also enacted cutting-edge legislation in the area of gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics and why we are currently working

to follow up on United Nations recommendations in other areas.

The future is female. We need to understand that we cannot succeed when approximately half of our global population is being held back. For centuries, women have played an important role in society, both in communities and, for the past decades, in the workplace. Yet this role has been under-appreciated, insufficiently acknowledged and at times even unrecognized. I firmly believe that the strong worldwide momentum pushing for women's rights should inspire leaders to review the pace of progress and ensure that Governments commit to achieving gender equality in our lifetime.

On a national level, Malta has been promoting numerous initiatives that underscore the country's commitment to the gender-equality agenda and the promotion of equal opportunities for all. We replaced our passive-benefit system, with its underlying poverty trap, with an active system that puts people back to work. We were not willing to continue to accept a situation in which we allowed thousands of lives to be spent in situations of unnecessary inactivity, in which families and individuals, mostly women, were trapped in a life on the edge, scraping through and marginalized at the edges of our society. This is why we introduced the tapering of social benefits, so that, when someone finds a job, they lose their benefits after a period of years, not immediately. Liberated from the excessive tax burden, those on social benefits — mostly women, once again — responded. The number of those on social assistance in our country has been cut in half in the past three years.

On the other hand, until a few years ago, working parents, mostly mothers, faced staggering childcare costs if they opted to go off to work. Their wages ended up financing childcare costs. We in Malta therefore introduced universal free childcare for all working parents. The result was essentially a silent social revolution. The female employment rate grew from 52 per cent to 63.4 per cent.

Yet that is not enough. We firmly believe that gender balance in politics would benefit not only women and female politicians, but also parties and society. Our country's record in female representation in the taking of political decisions is meagre, to say the least. In this regard, and aware of the persistent underrepresentation of women in Parliament, we launched a reform proposing affirmative action that can help us bridge the gap.

An individual's contribution to society and the relevance of one's thoughts and capabilities should not be affected by gender. We have to come to terms with the fact that social advancement has always been equated with empowerment and that therefore discrimination ultimately affects a nation's resilience and standing.

When I think about the future, my mind instantly goes to my daughters. Considering that this year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we should not be reflecting on the milestones achieved in its implementation, but, more importantly, we should be seeing that the areas that need to be addressed, such as including children's perspectives in all policies and decisions, are actually being made. Malta is currently working to fully incorporate the Convention into its legislation to enhance the full realization of children's rights, making them portable and fully accessible.

Good health, well-being and quality inclusive education are fundamental human rights and indispensable for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the realization of what we all agree upon. In this vein, all children — boys and girls — should have access to good quality health care and education to ensure their well-being. Our objective is to equip all children with the appropriate environment and tools that allow them to acquire all of the necessary skills and talents for citizenship and employability in the twenty-first century and beyond.

We are committed to providing an education through which our children develop their personal and social potential to the fullest and acquire the appropriate knowledge, competencies and attitudes through a curriculum that is oriented around such values as equity, social justice, diversity and inclusiveness. Such inclusion will result from ensuring that the educational environment is accessible in every way.

While striving to implement a mainstream approach to education, including through the adoption of a national inclusion policy, Malta also recognizes the importance of working to achieve equality in outcomes for all. In this regard, we believe that such an approach should be complemented by individualized and tailored supports, for example, for children with disabilities, to ensure, in the spirit of the SDGs, that no child is left behind.

We should therefore be committed to continuing to provide the best for our peoples for an improved quality

of life and a brighter future. Sustainable development is all about current and future generations, not just about specific economic sectors or social strata. A “generation” implies that we are all involved, and that therefore we are all expected to contribute to defining our own future and to leaving a better world for future generations — a future that we hope will be equal.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Lejeune Mbella Mbella, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cameroon.

Mr. Mbella Mbella (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to convey to the Members of the General Assembly the warm greetings of His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, Head of State, who has authorized me to represent him at this session of the General Assembly and to take the floor on his behalf.

In joining those who spoke at this rostrum before me, I would first like to express my sincere and brotherly congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on his election as president of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. I have no doubt that his extensive experience and leadership will enable him to successfully conduct our deliberations. Cameroon will give him all of its support for the full success of his mandate. Now is also a good opportunity for me to pay sincere tribute to his predecessor, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for the dedication and commitment with which she successfully led the work of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session.

I would like to reiterate Cameroon’s continued appreciation and encouragement to Secretary-General António Guterres his tenacity in carrying out the courageous and relevant reforms that he has initiated since his appointment as head of our Organization and for his guidance in managing the many global challenges. Cameroon would like to express our full support for his commitment to international peace and security, and economic and social progress in the world.

The current session is taking place in an international context where we are faced with multiple

challenges and where populations around the world are living in oppressive anxiety about the deterioration of international relations. The persistence of sources of tension in various regions of the world, particularly in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America is to be deplored. Terrorism, drug trafficking, transnational organized crime, including general banditry, and illicit trafficking of arms of all kinds appear to be spreading and are threatening the peace and stability of States and the flourishing of peoples. In addition, it is worth mentioning the phenomenon of migratory flows, which has become a matter of concern for all States, as it particularly affects young people in search of a better life.

On another level, it should also be noted that poverty and inequality persist and even seems to be gaining ground. Similarly, humankind is presently faced with a new scourge, namely, social media networks that have become full-fledged empires on their own. They carry masses of exaggerated information instantaneously and at the global scale, mixing truth and lies manipulated by actors in service of partisan interests, who by exercising their rights to freedom of opinion, expression or information deliberately trample on what is essential: respect for human dignity and our sense of responsibility. In addition to all of these scourges, the preservation of our planet is threatened by natural disasters, some of which are caused by human activity, be it climate disruption, floods, drought, volcanoes and earthquakes or other landslides, and fires, which cause the most varied types of damage.

In the face of those problems and misfortunes that know no borders because of increased globalization, Cameroon believes that the best solution lies, first and foremost, in increased, active, vigorous and better-structured solidarity at local, national, regional and international levels. Moreover, our century has major assets at its disposal — technological means and many other instruments and mechanisms — to address, eradicate or at least mitigate the devastating effects of these problems and concerns. Indeed, in today’s digital age, the exponential progress of science and technology has placed into human hands the most effective tools to reach the most remote parts of the universe and to explore and exploit the abyssal depths of the seas and oceans, in short, to control the infinitely large and the infinitely small. In sum, solutions are therefore within our reach to engage in a constructive, concerted and united approach.

The foregoing shows the relevance of theme of the general debate of the seventy-fourth session, namely, “Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion”. In choosing this theme, there is no doubt that the President wanted to make the international community aware of two major facts: first, the preservation of our common planet and the protection of humankind, which is at the centre of the planet and could be swallowed up and disappear if nothing is done, and secondly, the need to maintain a good interactive relationship and a necessary balance between these two entities.

In relation to the analysis I have just made, allow me to address the issue of multilateralism, on which many delegations have dwelt, and which cannot be dissociated from the theme of this session. Multilateralism is a healthy solution that must highlight our respect for the ideals, purposes and principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations. It calls for the strengthening of active solidarity and the will to live together in the strict observance of world cultural diversity with a view to promoting and preserving the interests of everyone, especially the weak. That naturally implies the establishment of a new and just international order based on our determination to eradicate poverty and achieve all of the Sustainable Development Goals in a safer and fairer world for both present and future generations.

We must focus on the cardinal values of good governance and democratization at both the national and international level, as well as the renunciation of unilateral decision-making. In this spirit, the reform of the Security Council and world economic institutions is of great importance, as that would enable all countries, in particular African countries, to regain the place they deserve in the community of nations.

The President took the Chair.

In this regard, Cameroon welcomes the General Assembly’s decisions to proclaim 24 April the annual International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace and to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations under the theme “The future we want, the United Nations we need: reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism”.

Efforts to implement an innovative, responsive form of multilateralism would be in vain if they did not give priority to the human being — if they did

not protect them from the dangers that arise from the disruption of peace, insecurity, natural or human-made socioeconomic precariousness, all of which prevent them from living in peace and dignity. Faced with each of the aforementioned challenges and in the context of our national Vision 2035 development document, which is in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union’s Agenda 2063, my country has committed to building a proactive, long-term development strategy that reflects the deep aspirations of its citizens to live in a democratic and prosperous country that is united in its diversity and that offers equal development opportunities to all its citizens. To that end, President Paul Biya has committed the Government to carrying out major structural projects to strengthen infrastructure, including roads, ports and energy facilities, as well as projects in such sectors as sports, public health, and urban and rural development.

Significant progress has been made, most notably in the areas of education and inequality reduction. We have launched ambitious programmes and projects aimed to fight poverty and climate change. We provided a detailed overview of our progress in the voluntary national review that we presented during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council in July.

In the field of education, for example, despite strong growth in the numbers of student enrolments, we have substantially reduced disparity between boys and girls and achieved a significantly higher secondary-school graduation rate. Our efforts are focused, inter alia, on ensuring that young Cameroonians in all regions of the country are able to enjoy their right to education.

With regard to inequality reduction, Cameroon has established a social safety-net programme, raised the level of guaranteed minimum income and increased salaries for public officials. A three-year special youth plan, with a budget of 102 billion CFA francs, which is roughly equivalent to \$175 million, is being implemented to facilitate the socioprofessional integration of young people. A large number of programmes have also been put in place to ensure the advancement of women and the family.

In terms of resilience and adaptation to climate change, Cameroon, which was among the first signatories to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change,

has set itself the goal of reducing carbon emissions to 32 per cent of current levels by 2035. I am pleased to inform the General Assembly that my country has adopted a national climate-change adaptation plan. Believing desertification to be one of the major consequences of climate change, Cameroon initiated, in 2008, the Green Sahel Reforestation Programme, which is aimed at restoring degraded land through such initiatives as an operation to plant thousands of trees in order to stop the desert from advancing. As part of this national action plan, the National Observatory for the Fight against Climate Change in Cameroon is now operational. Furthermore, our country is part of the great Congo basin forest in Central Africa and is home to the headquarters of the Commission of Central African Forests, for which we hold the presidency. This institution plays a crucial role in the management of the forests in our subregion and is an initiative to which all the countries of the region contribute.

It is to be hoped that funding for the implementation of the various programmes envisaged by the international community within the framework of the Green Fund will be made available in order to expedite the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The same stands for access to science, technology and innovation, for which wealthy countries must deliver on the promises made in the light of commitments entered into as part of the Paris Agreement.

As members of the General Assembly are aware, in recent years Cameroon and the countries of the Lake Chad basin, principally Chad, Nigeria and the Niger, have been subject to insecurity at the hands of the terrorist group Boko Haram. Our countries have been pooling resources and working together as part of the Multinational Joint Task Force to resolutely fight that terrorist sect. Thanks to our combined efforts, we have achieved considerable success in this fight.

Nevertheless, Boko Haram continues to have considerable capacity for wreaking havoc in the region. We therefore wish to take the opportunity to solemnly reiterate our gratitude to all our bilateral and multilateral partners who have tirelessly supported us in our fight against terrorism, a scourge that now affects all regions of the world. We call for their unwavering solicitude, particularly in the management of the grave humanitarian crisis that terrorism has unleashed, and specifically in taking care of the many refugees and displaced persons. In this regard, we appeal for decisive support from our bilateral and multilateral partners in

implementing the various development projects that we have designed in the region to eradicate poverty and, in so doing, tackle the root causes of the terrorist threat.

Another major concern my country is the crisis that has been playing out over the past three years in the north-west and south-west regions of the country. Separatist groups in these two regions have attempted to undermine Cameroon's territorial integrity, national unity and cohesion, the stability of its national institutions and the well-being of its people through armed violence, calls for boycotts, general strikes, lootings, kidnappings for ransom, assassinations and arson, as well as the destruction of infrastructure, including attacks of all kinds against hospitals, schools, students, parents and teachers, law-enforcement agencies and civilian populations, to say nothing of the destruction of the country's economic and social fabric. Moreover, this situation is provoking a wave of displaced persons and large numbers of refugees whom Cameroon is hosting, following sociopolitical crises in certain neighbouring brother countries.

Despite those difficult circumstances, the Government is controlling that internal and localized crisis, which poses no threat to subregional, let alone regional or international, peace and security. We manage it in the spirit of dialogue and cooperation. I can say today with satisfaction that the process initiated by the Government and driven by the Head of State for the management of the security situation in the north-west and south-west regions of Cameroon and for a definitive return to peace has made great progress. A decisive step forward was taken on 10 September 2019, with the announcement by the Head of State, His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, to convene a major and inclusive national dialogue.

(spoke in English)

At this stage, I would like to share with the General Assembly the views of the President of the Republic on this major national dialogue. The national dialogue will allow Cameroonians

“to seek ways and means of meeting the high aspirations of the people of the north-west and south-west regions, but also of all the other components of our nation. The dialogue in question will mainly concern the situation in the north-west and south-west regions. Since it will focus on issues of national interest such as national unity, national integration and living together, it is obvious that it

will not concern only the population of these two regions. The dialogue will therefore rally all the sons and daughters of our beloved and beautiful country, Cameroon, to reflect on values that are dear to us, namely, peace, security, national unity and progress.

“It will also focus on... bilingualism, cultural diversity and social cohesion, the reconstruction and development of conflict-affected areas, the return of refugees and displaced persons, the education and judicial system, decentralization and local development, the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, the role of the diaspora in the country’s development...”

“The dialogue... will bring together a wide range of personalities: parliamentarians, politicians, opinion leaders, intellectuals, economic operators, traditional authorities, religious authorities, members of the diaspora, representatives of defence and security forces, armed groups and victims.”

(spoke in French)

I am pleased that the announcement by the President of the Republic of Cameroon concerning this major national dialogue was favourably received by the national and international community, as well as, inter alia, the United Nations, the African Union Commission, the European Union, the Commonwealth, and la Francophonie. Cameroon expresses its gratitude to them for their willingness to support us in this major exercise. It should be noted that the Prime Minister, our Head of Government, is currently conducting intensive consultations with the nation’s stakeholders, including civil society, for the full success of the dialogue, which is due to be officially launched on 30 September.

As members know, Cameroon has always been committed to promoting the rule of law and respect for human rights in their civil and political, economic, social and cultural aspects. The Government places particular emphasis on the fight against corruption. To that end, it has established bodies and mechanisms for good governance, guaranteeing the rule of law, development, prosperity, harmony and national cohesion.

With particular regard to abuses and other violations of human rights committed in the context of the crisis in the north-west and south-west regions, Cameroon is committed to the principle of impunity. In this perspective, perpetrators of attack on the stability

of the State and all recorded crimes will also be held accountable before the competent courts, in strict compliance with the law. In this context, allow me to quote the President of the Republic once again:

“[R]espect for the rule of law and the fight against impunity are pillars in the consolidation of a State ruled by law to which we all aspire. Violating the rule of law and granting impunity to some citizens is paving the way for anarchy.”

I reiterate from this rostrum the appeal of the President of the Republic of Cameroon to countries that harbour extremists and promoters of hatred and violence to arrest and act against those criminals in accordance with the law. In passing, I thank those of our partners that have already committed to cooperating with us in this area. This occasion gives me the opportunity to warmly acknowledge the contribution of bilateral and multilateral partners that have always reaffirmed Cameroon’s unity and territorial integrity. Their ongoing attentiveness and support are of great value. I reassure them that the President of the Republic of Cameroon, His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, and his Government are making every effort to invest in resolving the crisis in the north-west and south-west and in restoring lasting peace in my country.

As I previously stated, we are now at a turning point in the history of the world in which peoples and nations are called to live in peace. The fundamental mission of our Organization remains that of guaranteeing peace and international security because there can be no development — the development to which we all aspire — without peace and security. Cameroon will continue to support the United Nations in this noble mission.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Miguel Vargas Maldonado, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic.

Mr. Vargas Maldonado (Dominican Republic) *(spoke in Spanish)*: It is an honour for me to participate in this new session of the General Assembly and to address this illustrious Hall on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Danilo Medina Sánchez, President of the Dominican Republic.

Since the founding of the United Nations 74 years ago, my country has been deeply committed to the Organization’s mission of cooperation for peace, security and the development of peoples. This year,

that commitment was renewed when we assumed a non-permanent seat on its Security Council for the first time, despite being founders of the United Nations. That is, of course, a responsibility that honours and binds us. That is why, we have done our utmost since January to ensure that our contribution to the Council always involves the search for broad consensus, which facilitates decision-making and efficiency.

As part of that work, at the beginning of the year, when we assumed the presidency, we organized an open debate on the impacts of climate-related disasters and their negative effects on international peace and security (see S/PV.8451). That debate takes on new meaning in the current context, following the wave of fires in the Amazon and the recent passage of Hurricane Dorian, which left behind a trail of shocking damage and many victims.

It should be noted that for us and our Caribbean region, the effects of climate change are real, visible and devastating, and threaten the very existence of our countries. In that regard, we are encouraged by the fact that Secretary-General António Guterres convened the Climate Action Summit to address climate action within the broader framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which we were very honoured to attend. We agree with him that climate change is the defining issue of our time and a direct existential threat. We have also been particularly attentive to the regional agenda in matters such as humanitarian aid for Venezuela or the preparation of the new support mission to Haiti.

We have little more than a decade left to make a reality of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by this very Assembly. Therefore, it is the duty of every country to take stock of their achievements, verify progress, monitor remaining challenges and, of course, immediately take the necessary actions to ensure success for each one of the Goals.

I must note that, in the case of the Dominican Republic, the 2030 Agenda was immediately integrated into our daily activity because, from day one, our Government has shared the same focus — putting people's needs first. Like the SDGs, our first priority as a Government has always been to fight poverty and hunger, which we have approached from all angles, from the implementation of social policies to guaranteeing access to credit and, of course, promoting the development of our rural areas, which, as the United

Nations Food and Agriculture Organization explains in its latest reports, is the locus of the highest levels of poverty in our region.

This multidimensional strategy, to which President Danilo Medina Sánchez himself has dedicated great effort, as in the case of the surprise visits he has carried out, has enabled us to obtain good results. The extreme poverty rate in our country fell from 9.9 per cent in 2012 to 2.9 per cent in 2018, representing a tremendous achievement. Overall poverty decreased from 39.7 per cent to 23 per cent in the same period. The greatest decrease was in the countryside, where rural poverty fell from 49.3 per cent in 2012 to 25.6 per cent in 2018 thanks to the continuous support that the Government has been offering to our agricultural producers.

In addition, over the past decade, our country has had more success in reducing hunger than any other country in Latin America. We are one of only four countries in which that trend has remained stable over the past two years, while many neighbouring countries have, unfortunately, seen their progress slow.

We have also made great strides in the indicators for Goal 4, because inclusive and quality education is also a central goal of our Government. That goal has translated into the allocation of 4 per cent of our gross domestic product to education and the implementation of the greatest educational transformation that our country has experienced in its history. We have also made significant progress in other important areas, such as health, water conservation, gender equality, access to energy and sustainable economic growth, among others.

Of course, we still have a lot of work to do and we know that there are no shortcuts to reaching the Goals, which can be achieved only through effort and persistence. It fills us with optimism to know that, a year after the end of the current term of office, under the wise leadership of President Medina, alliances have been established with all sectors of our society. What that means is that regardless of our political future, the development agenda, which already belongs to all citizens, will be able to follow its course at a steady pace. We trust that the Dominican Republic will continue to advance, alongside our brother countries of the region, in order to overcome the great and urgent challenges that lie ahead, such as climate change.

On the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which we

are a signatory, we note that the Dominican Republic is fully resolved to honour its global commitment to guaranteeing the rights of every child. We reiterate that commitment today and will redouble our efforts in that regard. We are the first country in our region that, after having reached consensus within society, created a national road map for the prevention of violence against children and adolescents and care for its victims. In that connection, we will continue to work in all areas, from inclusive education to the reduction of neonatal deaths, the promotion of timely birth registration and the eradication of child labour. All our actions are guided by the goal of ensuring full, safe and happy lives for all children and adolescents in the Dominican Republic.

With those children and their future in mind, reducing inequalities is undoubtedly one of the priorities of the United Nations system. It is important to bridge the gap between the countries spearheading the development agenda and those with the greatest difficulties. However, it is important to note that the nature of those gaps and the challenges we face in overcoming them change. When we talk about inclusion, we can no longer talk only about meeting basic needs. In a few years, the new marginalized, the new poor, may no longer be those who have no food or shelter. In fact, soon, we will hopefully succeed in resolving that problem once and for all.

However, it is possible that the newly excluded are those who do not have access to knowledge, the Internet and new technologies, and will therefore increasingly face difficulties in entering the labour market. If we want to talk about inclusion, development and opportunities, we must talk about decent employment and decent incomes. It is certain that technological changes, according to some studies, could eliminate 50 per cent of jobs in the next 20 years — 50 per cent. That could jeopardize all the progress made by the Dominican Government.

Technology is already transforming the way we relate to the world today and, in this new era, establishing great differences among countries that are most plugged in and those that are not. I offer a single fact — only 20 per cent of people in the least developed countries have access to the Internet compared to 80 per cent of people in the most developed countries. To them I ask: What possibilities do those least developed countries have of competing in the new economy of the fourth industrial revolution? That includes countries like the Dominican Republic, where there is much

greater Internet penetration. How will we be able to integrate populations in the most isolated areas that still live with technology from the first industrial revolution and dedicate themselves, perhaps, to subsistence agriculture? Therefore, the most urgent question we must ask ourselves now is: Will the transformation, already under way, contribute to closing the gaps of inclusion or will it contrarily further widen the gap between rich and poor?

Presently, the truth is that the outlook is far from promising. Most experts seem to agree that, at least in its present form, the technological revolution will not contribute to reducing inequality. In its current state, the gap is widening among those who are prepared to occupy the jobs of the future and those who are not, irrespective of whether the technological revolution leads to the creation or disappearance of jobs. That is why we are making an urgent appeal to the General Assembly to avoid a course towards the inequality that the model for technological development seems to be taking. To that end, initiatives are of great importance. Such initiatives include the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, which helps us in the search for solutions to the problem of digital security, equity and the fulfilment of rights in cyberspace, and the efforts made by the United Nations Development Programme to reduce inequalities and promote the progress and welfare of humankind through new technologies.

Of course, that connects with the fact that we must also work together to increase investment in research and development if we want to move towards the next stage of growth. Unfortunately, that is an area in which our countries are lagging behind. On the list of the 10 most innovative countries in the world, headed by South Korea, Germany and Finland, there is not a single Latin American country. We consider it an urgent priority to efficiently and continuously implement instruments, such as knowledge exchange, skills building, access to technology and cooperation in science and innovation. Accordingly, the Government of the Dominican Republic takes this opportunity to ask those leading countries in the transformation of knowledge and skills to accompany us in that process.

In the experience of the Dominican Government, it is just as important to give answers to present problems as it is to be able to anticipate future needs. As leaders, it is our responsibility to continuously act under both perspectives. A vision for the future must include those who have not yet been able to meet their basic needs

and a short-term vision must consider the consequences that our actions may have on future generations. That is why it is pressing now, more than ever, to deal with the present without looking away from the future. Only if we achieve that challenging balance will we be helping to unite our societies at both ends, closing gaps and healing wounds. Only in that way will we be building a more just, prosperous and sustainable future for all.

The Dominican Government invites the General Assembly to explore new ways of cooperation and to advance the present urgent agenda and the needs of the future. We have no time to lose. The time is here — the time is now. Only with commitment, with determination and with a vision focused on the interests of our peoples will we emerge victorious from the multiple challenges that are testing developing countries. The United Nations can always count on the Dominican Republic to work actively for the well-being of present and future generations.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Alain Claude Bilie By Nze, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, Regional Integration, Francophonie and Gabonese Abroad of the Gabonese Republic.

Mr. Bilie By Nze (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): It is a special pleasure for me to offer, on behalf of the President of the Gabonese Republic, His Excellency Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba, my congratulations to President Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on his election as head of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. I would like to assure him of the support of my country throughout his mandate.

I would also like to pay a well-deserved tribute to his predecessor, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for her outstanding commitment and the diligence with which she led our work during the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. Allow me also to convey my congratulations to the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, on the scale of the reforms that have been undertaken and committed to in order to render our Organization more efficient and able to address the challenges facing our world today.

This session is being held at a time when the world is suffering the terrible effects of climate change. The devastation of Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in southern Africa and, more recently, Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas and on the east coast of the United States, to mention only those recent cases, remain a tragedy

of grim memory that demonstrates the extreme vulnerability of our planet to the unprecedented scale of evidence of climate change.

As the people of Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe struggle to recover from the dreadful damage and trauma of those destructive disasters, our conscience must be to recall the need and urgency to act together against that threat, to which no one is immune. In saying that, I have in mind and pay tribute to former French President Jacques Chirac, who has just departed from us and who used to so aptly say: “Our house is burning and we are looking elsewhere”.

The theme of our discussions is particularly relevant and topical. How can we galvanize multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion in an international context in which multilateralism is tested more than ever and in which terrorism and violent extremism continue to spread death, fear and insecurity in many parts of the world? It is a context in which famine, malnutrition, endemic diseases and social exclusion prevail as predators of human dignity and an international context marked by an unprecedented migration crisis, which requires the international community to be even more united in order to ensure an inclusive and united response to a phenomenon that jeopardizes the well-being of the life force of our nations.

More than ever, the diverse threats and dangers that jeopardize our civilization challenge us as much as the harsh reality that the destiny of future generations will depend on our ability to make bold decisions today.

The theme of our work highlights our interdependence, our interconnection and humankind’s common destiny given the global threats that transcend both the illusion of national borders and the barriers of social classes and human inequality. We are bound more than ever before to act collectively to reconcile development with lasting peace and the preservation of the environment for current and future generations. This is the place to reaffirm the expectations and needs of Governments to see the United Nations respond to the ongoing tireless legitimate calls of the peoples of the world for a lasting peace, for greater justice and for respect for human dignity.

It is four years since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1), followed by the signing of the Paris Agreement. Yet we note with regret the limited results in combating climate change,

which remain well below expectations. Worse still, some actors continue to clearly doubt the relevance of climate change and operate in a contradictory dynamic. Despite that distressing observation, we must not wait any longer to translate our various commitments into concrete action to accelerate the pace of their implementation. It is now more than ever the time to measure the progress made and to understand the difficulties encountered, while taking into account the new challenges that sometimes require us to adapt our strategies.

It is undeniable that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals requires a significant mobilization and pooling of both human and financial resources and a greater mobilization and involvement of the private sector. The pooling of our efforts is all the more crucial given the fact that the ongoing fluctuating and depreciating prices of oil and a number of other raw materials have greatly weakened the economies of the producing countries, such as my country, Gabon. High budgetary dependence on oil revenue has led to a worsening of the public deficit and a significant slowdown in public investment, particularly in the social dimension.

In that respect, from this rostrum President Ali Bongo Ondimba launched a solemn appeal for international solidarity and robust and coordinated actions for the benefit of developing countries towards the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (see A/72/PV.11).

It is therefore urgent to meet the commitments made towards developing countries, particularly in the areas of clean technology transfer and improving people's access to renewable energy, to accelerate their transition from a traditional polluting industry to a low-carbon, environmentally friendly one.

In the light of that requirement, we welcome the recent convening of the Climate Action Summit, while commending the interest in and the amount of the pledges made, which were in line with our aspirations and needs. It is now up to us to go beyond solemn commitments and formal announcements to realize the developed projects in order to further protect biodiversity. Similarly, it is essential to ensure the effectiveness and greater prominence of the financing and resource mobilization strategy so as to more specifically support the implementation of our initiatives. That support must take into account the

specific national characteristics and particular needs of each State.

In the same vein, it is appropriate to assume our common but differentiated responsibilities, in line with our respective contributions, and to determine a governance model that not only incorporates regional parity and the participation of all stakeholders but also enhances consistency among the key bodies dedicated to protecting the environment.

For Gabon, climate change action is based on three pillars, namely, improving living conditions, implementing climate adaptation projects and protecting biodiversity. That bold choice, in view of the scale of the challenges, has already earned my country's recognition by our development partners, which have just declared us the very first African country to benefit from international funds to continue our efforts in the fight against deforestation.

Development cannot be sustainable without peace and stability. Yet peace continues to be harshly tested in several regions of the world. Ongoing terrorist attacks show us that no nation is immune to the threat, to which our response must be collective. We unequivocally condemn those many acts of barbarism and reiterate our full solidarity and our support to the countries and peoples who fall victim to them.

The cost of instability due to terrorism and the fear of armed groups is particularly high for many African countries that are forced to devote significant resources to such phenomena, which are maintained by the trade in small arms and illicit trafficking in fauna and flora, among other things. It is clear that the good intentions and concern of the international community are no longer enough to combat those sources of instability and poverty in several parts of Africa. A comprehensive and united approach is essential and must be achieved by eliminating the root causes of such phenomena as well as the awareness that the threat against one nation is a threat against all.

My country, Gabon, advocates a concerted approach to peace. In the light of that vision, we remain resolutely committed to working alongside the United Nations, in particular to promote stability and peace in the Central African Republic. We believe that besides the inclusive nature of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, negotiated in Khartoum by all the parties involved in the crisis, a lasting solution depends on strengthening

the State's capacities. That is why Gabon advocates for completely lifting the arms embargo still in force in the Central African Republic. In Gabon's concerted approach, led by President Bongo Ondimba, we have consistently worked to promote dialogue in most of the areas of tension at a subregional level, together with our peers in the Economic Community of Central African States, which Gabon currently chairs. This is also the place for us to welcome the announcement of a national dialogue in Cameroon, which shows our neighbour's willingness to find a lasting solution to its challenges. Incidentally, my country denounces the separatist tendencies in African States, which not only help to weaken the social fabric but distract from our progress towards development.

Gabon, like many oil-producing countries, has been hit hard by the impact of the drastic drop in commodity prices, a situation that has led to a slowdown in economic activity. In that context, the Government has initiated a series of recovery measures aimed at reducing imbalances that include adjusting the budget, developing infrastructure and promoting the private sector, so as to diversify and transform our economy. The main objective of the economic recovery plan we have implemented is to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth capable of profoundly transforming our economy and boosting investment. Today we can welcome the encouraging signs emerging from the three-year evaluation of the implementation of the recovery plan, particularly in terms of balancing public finance and mobilizing and controlling expenditure and debt. As a result of this improved growth, thanks to the economic reforms, the Government is gradually regaining the margin it needs to finance the areas where investment is most urgently needed, particularly quality education, an area for which the President has just announced a major reform, aimed at optimizing the education system in order to align it better with the demand for excellence and to meet a real need in the labour market.

Inclusion is a major policy concern for Gabon. Our President emphasized how crucial it is in a recent address to the nation in which he reiterated his call for involving all sectors in building a stronger and more prosperous country. That is definitely the purpose of our equal-opportunity programme, which is the guiding principle of the Government's actions promoting more equitable development and which focuses particularly

on women, young people and the disabled in order to ensure that no one is left behind.

Speaking of international solidarity and inclusion, I would once again like to call from this rostrum for the total lifting of the decades-long embargo imposed on the Government and people of Cuba, in order to remove the obstacles to their achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is a legitimate aspiration for all the peoples of the world.

In conclusion, on behalf of Gabon, I want to call for a reform of global governance characterized by greater justice and fairer sharing of responsibilities between North and South. The best expression of that would be reform of the Security Council whereby the African continent is represented based on the African common position, as outlined in the Ezulwini Consensus. Such a reform, which we all hope for, will have the advantage of bringing the world into line with the demands of the times and above all with the values that are the foundation of our common faith in order to forever banish the spectre of war and raise high the flag of peace. Given those values, we cannot deprive more than 1 billion people of the right to have a say in the direction of the global agenda.

Finally, I would like to reiterate Gabon's commitment to multilateralism, to which we believe there is no credible alternative in our common desire to confront the increasingly complex challenges of sustainable development and in our quest for appropriate solutions to the challenges and threats facing humankind.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

Before giving the floor to speakers in exercise of the right of reply, I would like to remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): We have asked for the floor to lay out some key facts that completely refute assertions made about my country by the Prime Minister of Armenia in his speech at the general debate (see A/74/PV.6).

First, the history that Armenia has so desperately been trying to manipulate in order to serve its territorial claims is not on its side. It is well known that the move of Armenians into what the Prime Minister of Armenia

calls the ancestral homeland started in the nineteenth century. Their most recent resettlement in the South Caucasus and their attempts at territorial expansion laid a foundation for the long-term instability, tension and conflict in the region that continue to this day and that have been accompanied by massacres and forced deportations of the Azerbaijani population.

Secondly, the illegality, based on the Soviet legal system in effect at the time, of any attempts aimed either at unifying the Nagorno Karabakh region with Armenia or achieving its unilateral secession from Azerbaijan was confirmed at the highest constitutional level. It was clear that the definition of the territory of Azerbaijan as it proceeded to independence, and in the light of the applicable law, clearly included the Nagorno Karabakh region. The situation that followed Azerbaijan's independence and the subsequent actions of Armenia is also clear. The fact that the Nagorno Karabakh region is an integral part of Azerbaijan was confirmed by the Security Council, which in its resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993) determined that Armenia's territorial claims and actions are unlawful and incompatible with the prohibition of the use of armed force in international relations. Numerous documents adopted by other international organizations are framed along the same lines. It is also pertinent to recall that the General Assembly's agenda includes a special item entitled "The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan".

Thirdly, Armenia's misinterpretation of self-determination has nothing in common with that principle as it is laid down in the Charter of the United Nations, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and other international documents. What the Prime Minister of Armenia describes as the exercise of self-determination has been described by the Security Council as the unlawful use of force. It is in fact the right to self-determination of the people of Azerbaijan that has been grossly violated as a result of Armenia's policies of aggression, occupation and ethnic cleansing.

Fourthly, human rights and fundamental freedoms are universal and embrace all humankind, and respect for those rights must be accorded on an equal and non-discriminatory basis. In contrast to that generally accepted definition, Armenia's policy and practices are based on exclusion and discrimination on ethnic grounds. Unlike Azerbaijan and other States in the region, therefore, Armenia is a uniquely

monoethnic country. It has also ethnically cleansed the occupied territories and now refuses even to accept the existence of the Azerbaijani community of the Nagorno Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

It gives rise to the obvious conclusion that Armenia cannot demand privileges, at the very core of which are gross and systematic violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and the discriminatory denial of the rights and freedoms of others, in particular of the significantly larger Azerbaijani population, totalling more than 1 million people, who have been expelled and prevented from returning to their homes and properties in both Armenia and the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Armenia's denial of responsibility for its crimes is a defiance of human rights and a direct obstacle to lasting peace and genuine reconciliation.

Against that background, Yerevan's speculations with regard to human rights, democracy and so-called anti-Armenian sentiments and anti-Armenian hate speech are irresponsible and misleading, to say the least. By asserting that Azerbaijan allegedly wants the territory without people, the Prime Minister of Armenia simply confuses fictitious objectives attributed to my country with the real policy of his Government.

Fifthly, the Prime Minister of Armenia spoke eagerly in his speech (see A/74/PV.6) about the peaceful settlement of the conflict and its crucial importance for the stability and security of the region. However, mere words are evidently not sufficient for achieving progress in the settlement process, especially when the commitments and deeds of Armenia have always been at odds with that objective.

Needless to say, Armenia's continued aggression, non-compliance with international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, inflammatory statements, various provocations on the ground and attempts to change the demographic economic, social and cultural character of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan cannot be reconciled with the goal of achieving a peaceful settlement.

Most importantly, no peace settlement to the conflict can be reached that runs counter to the Constitution of Azerbaijan and is inconsistent with international law. The primary objective of the ongoing peace process, the mandate of which is based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, is to ensure the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of

the Armenian armed forces from the Nagorno Karabakh region and all other occupied territories of Azerbaijan; the restoration of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders; and the return of forcibly displaced persons to their homes and properties.

The unlawful use of force and the resulting military occupation and ethnic cleansing of the territories of Azerbaijan do not represent a solution and will never bring about peace, reconciliation and stability. Rather than wasting time on attempts to mislead the international community and its own people, Armenia must renounce its futile attempts to prolong the unsustainable status quo and faithfully comply with its international obligations. The sooner Yerevan realizes the lack of any prospect for its destructive political agenda, the sooner both of our peoples will be able to benefit from peace, stability and cooperation.

Mr. Knyazyan (Armenia): We have requested the floor to exercise our right of reply to respond to the delegation of Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani side deliberately inverts the root causes of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and the consequences of its own aggression. More than 30 years ago on 20 February 1988, the local Parliament of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region adopted a decision through which it requested both then Soviet Armenia and Soviet Azerbaijan to show understanding for the will and aspirations of the Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh and agree on the transfer of the region from Azerbaijan to Armenia.

Unfortunately, that bid for self-determination was answered not by understanding and dialogue but by violence, ethnic cleansing, the deportation of more than 400,000 Armenians, the abolishment of the status quo, war and premeditated massacres in Sumgait, Kirovabad, Baku and other cities of Azerbaijan that were condemned by the international community, including by a resolution of the European Parliament of 7 July 1988, which described the Sumgait massacre as anti-Armenian pogroms that constituted a threat to the safety of Armenians living in Azerbaijan.

The impunity granted to the masterminds of the massacre paved the way for the ethnic cleansing carried out throughout Azerbaijan, which reached its climax during the bloody massacres and mass deportations of the Armenians of Baku in January 1990 and the subsequent full-scale military aggression against the

people of Nagorno Karabakh with the objective of their complete extermination.

With regard to legal matters, we would like to stress that Nagorno Karabakh gained its independence in the context of the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, in full compliance with both international law and the then applicable legislation of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Law on the Procedure for Resolving Issues Related to a Union Republic's Secession from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of 3 April 1990 authorized autonomous entities and compact ethnic groups within a former Soviet Republic to freely and independently decide their own legal status in the event that such a Republic seceded from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

In strict adherence to that Law, the Nagorno Karabakh authorities adopted their own declaration of independence and held a referendum on 10 December 1991. I would like to stress that when the referendum was held in Nagorno Karabakh, the Azerbaijani population was living there and was offered every opportunity to take part in the referendum.

There are two approaches to dealing with legal matters — through the letter of the law or through the spirit of the law. Since the Azerbaijani side does not recognize the legal framework of the declaration of independence of Nagorno Karabakh, I will elaborate on the spirit of the law.

First, Nagorno Karabakh has never been part of an independent Azerbaijan and the latter has never exercised any sovereignty over it.

Secondly, Nagorno Karabakh has never been a bicomunal entity and Armenians have always constituted an absolute majority of the Nagorno Karabakh population.

Thirdly, Azerbaijan is attempting to return to the status quo of its Soviet past. However, just as the restoration of the former Soviet Union is impossible, the same holds true for the restoration of the territorial integrity of former Soviet Azerbaijan. We regret that the Azerbaijani party continues its practice of applying selective references to, and distortions of, the relevant Security Council resolutions, which were adopted during the military phase of the conflict and did not lead to the immediate cessation of hostilities owing to the position of Azerbaijan and its continuous attempt to impose a solution to the conflict by force.

Today, 25 years after the ceasefire agreement, the primary objective of the resolutions — a complete ceasefire — has yet to be achieved. Azerbaijan refers to a single element of the resolutions by downplaying all others, such as the lifting of the blockade or neglecting the parties to the conflict referred to in the resolutions. All the relevant resolutions have clearly recognized Nagorno Karabakh as a party to the conflict.

If Azerbaijan is willing to implement the resolutions, it should first and foremost reach out to the authorities of Nagorno Karabakh in order to achieve progress in resolving the conflict. The main obstacle preventing the resolution of the conflict is not the position of Armenia or Nagorno Karabakh, but Azerbaijani's policy and actions, which are impeding progress in bringing about a peaceful resolution. The consistent policy of Azerbaijan to change the balance among parties to the conflict is undermining the peace process.

Azerbaijani leadership explicitly refers to the need to resolve the conflict by enhancing its military and economic capacities and capabilities, thus imposing its will on Armenian Nagorno Karabakh. Azerbaijan continues its destabilizing and uncontrolled military build-up in violation of its legally binding obligations under the conventional arms control regime. Azerbaijan continues to resort to massive military provocations and subversive actions. It rejects all proposals aimed at consolidating the ceasefire, including strengthening the permanent presence and capacities of international monitors and the establishment of an investigative mechanism for ceasefire violations.

There is a certain distortion of notions in the claim by Azerbaijan concerning the consolidation of the status quo. Armenia is eager to go beyond the status quo in the pursuit of an outcome that includes a negotiated and peaceful settlement.

Consolidation will create an environment conducive to a peaceful and negotiated settlement. It therefore does not promote the status quo; rather, it promotes the opposite. In its escalation of the situation, Azerbaijan is responsible for maintaining the status quo and causing human casualties. It is well known that the Azerbaijani leadership officially promotes within its society the universal hatred of all Armenians. The ruling elite of Azerbaijan have placed the dehumanization of Armenians, as well as the glorification of hate crimes against Armenians

and those who perpetrate such crimes, among the cornerstones of their permanent policy.

The reports of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), established by the Council of Europe, recognize Armenians as a vulnerable group within Azerbaijan. The 2016 ECRI report on Azerbaijan indicated that:

“Political leaders, educational institutions and media have continued using hate speech against Armenians; an entire generation of Azerbaijanis has now grown up listening to this hateful rhetoric. Human rights activists working inter alia towards reconciliation with Armenia have been sentenced to heavy prison terms on controversial accusations... [I]n 2012 the authorities pardoned, released and promoted Ramil Safarov, who had been sentenced in Budapest to life imprisonment for the murder of an Armenian army officer, without taking into account the risk of cultivating a sense of impunity for the perpetrators of racist crime.”

Those examples and many others show that a country with very low human rights standards can become a threat to regional security, because the ruling elite derives its legitimacy not from the protection of human rights but from their violation.

We would like to conclude our remarks on the political process by reminding Azerbaijan that the conflict is not about territories but about the rights of the indigenous people who have lived in their ancestral homeland for millennia. We regret to note that Azerbaijan's entire policy on Armenia has remained unchanged more than 25 years, while the people of Nagorno Karabakh continue to face threats to their very existence.

Azerbaijan refuses to recognize the right to self-determination of the people of Nagorno Karabakh — yet that very right is proclaimed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-Chair countries as one of the basic principles for the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and was also endorsed in the ministerial statement of the 2009 meeting in Athens of the OSCE Ministerial Council, to which Azerbaijan also agreed.

The determination of the final legal status of Nagorno Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will stands at the core of the settlement. Should respect be accorded to the human rights of the people

of Nagorno Karabakh — including the right to freedom of movement, the right to vote and the right to self-determination — our region could move towards greater prosperity and respect for human rights in general.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): The representative of Armenia did not even wish to go to the trouble of listening carefully to what we have said and instead preferred to read out a prepared text containing a list of standard falsifications. As a result, we heard comments that were irrelevant and out of context and that obviously failed to respond to our arguments.

As is well known, it was Armenia that resorted to force, violence and terrorist activities in an attempt to realize its groundless and unlawful territorial claims. It is Armenia that has captured and continues to occupy the Nagorno Karabakh region and the surrounding districts of Azerbaijan, in gross violation of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The entire international community recognizes that Nagorno Karabakh is an integral part of Azerbaijan. It has been stated at the international level on numerous occasions that the racist, puppet regime that Armenia has set up in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan is illegal. That regime is entirely unrecognized and is under the effective political, military and economic control of Armenia.

As is well known, the object and purpose of the Security Council resolutions and presidential statements were the Armenian armed attacks against Azerbaijan in 1992 and 1993. The demand for a cessation of hostilities was thus first and foremost directed at the invading Armenian forces. It was the Armenian side that intentionally disregarded the demands of the Security Council for the immediate cessation of all military activities and hostile acts.

The events that unfolded prior to, and in the aftermath of, the adoption of each resolution make it clear that Armenia's allegations are baseless and leave no doubt as to who was responsible for the continued armed hostilities and to whom the demands of the Security Council were exclusively addressed. One has only to carefully read the texts of those documents and the individual statements of the members of the Security Council to understand that the comments of the delegate of Armenia are simply misleading, to say the least.

Armenia has consistently obstructed the conflict settlement process and in the meantime is refraining from engaging responsibly and constructively in result-oriented negotiations while regularly resorting to various provocations to escalate the situation on the ground. Furthermore, against the background of numerous documents of the relevant United Nations bodies and other international organizations that express serious concern about human rights and the spirit of intolerance in Armenia, Yerevan should be the last to comment on self-determination and human rights in other countries.

All of the above confirms that despite its change of Government under the false banner of human rights and democracy, Armenia continues to pose a serious threat to regional and international peace, security and stability and should therefore be the subject of constant attention and urgent action by the United Nations and the wider international community.

Mr. Knyazyan (Armenia): Protracted conflicts cannot be resolved by bringing forward protracted, well known accusations and distorted narratives. We take note that the Azerbaijani delegation has failed to address any of the well documented arguments — originating not from the Armenian side but from the reports of international organizations.

The people of Nagorno Karabakh have enjoyed de facto independence since the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, when Nagorno Karabakh exercised its inherent right to self-determination in accordance with State legislation and international law. Therefore, the claims of Azerbaijan to exercise its sovereignty over the people of Nagorno Karabakh are baseless and without any legal grounds.

Despite the peaceful and legitimate nature of the demonstrations in Nagorno Karabakh — which have been peaceful from the very beginning — Azerbaijan has rejected dialogue, resorted to the language of threats and intimidation and pursued a policy of violent oppression of the free will of the people. Thousands of Armenians have been killed and maimed, while hundreds of thousands have been deported. The massacres of the Armenian population of Azerbaijan have clearly demonstrated that the Azerbaijani authorities are pursuing the goal of the total extermination of the Armenian population and that the people of Nagorno Karabakh face an existential threat.

First, I would like to stress that the status and security of the people of Nagorno Karabakh are key issues for resolving the conflict and they remain the absolute priority of the Republic of Armenia.

Secondly, the people and authorities of Nagorno Karabakh should have a decisive role in conflict resolution. The attempts to objectify Nagorno Karabakh and its people contradict not only the origin of the conflict, to which I have already made reference, but also the facts on the ground today.

Thirdly, Nagorno Karabakh is not a no man's land — it is populated by its indigenous people who have made up an absolute majority of the population throughout all stages of the conflict. Without stronger involvement of the elected representatives of Nagorno Karabakh, any search for lasting peace will not be genuine. The role of the Nagorno Karabakh authorities is essential to all areas of their competence and jurisdiction on the ground.

Fourthly, we reiterate that there should be no military solution to the conflict — we must turn away from military action. That was the primary call of the Security Council resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), which Azerbaijan is failing to implement even today. The reduction of tensions should be followed by the consolidation of the ceasefire

regime through the implementation of the agreements reached in Vienna, St. Petersburg and Dushanbe.

Fifthly, in creating an environment conducive to peace we must not only reduce tensions and adopt monitoring and verification mechanisms but also prepare our people for peace. We note that the Azerbaijan side has remained silent in response to the positive messages of the Armenian Prime Minister that were voiced yesterday at the General Assembly. Hostile rhetoric and maximalist stances casting doubt on the very possibility of compromise nurture animosity — not peace.

Lastly, in response to the reference of the Azerbaijani delegation to the democratically elected authorities of Nagorno Karabakh as a “racist puppet regime” (see A/73/PV.106), I would like to stress that according to the reports of a number of international human rights organizations, Nagorno Karabakh is far ahead of Azerbaijan in terms of democratic practices, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Therefore, a delegation that represents a hereditary regime that transfers power within a single family has no right to point fingers at a democratic Government that has been formed on the basis of the free expression of the will of its citizens.

The meeting rose at 9.50 p.m.